



Neighbours: Holy Trinity School, left, and the Archer Academy, right, in Eagans Close.

Parents' emotions run high at Academy public meeting

By Neil McNaughton

When Archer Academy governors and trust called a consultation meeting in January over the proposed changes to its admissions policy, they no doubt expected strong opinions would be expressed, and so it proved. At times, Martin Bright, a parent governor of the academy who chaired the event, struggled to control the meeting which was attended by nearly 300 people, but in the end he succeeded and a measured debate followed.

The key issue and main point of contention was the trustees' proposal to reserve 55 out of its 150 annual places for five schools from N2, N3 and NW11 from September 2017 but to exclude its neighbouring primary school Holy Trinity as a nominated feeder school.

The trustees explained that the academy had been set up on a strictly non-denominational basis and so to nominate a Church of England school like Holy Trinity would be contrary to these founding principles. This view was strongly opposed by the parents of several Holy Trinity children on the grounds that the academy was simply replacing one kind of discrimination for another.

Community and proximity

It was also pointed out by angry East Finchley residents that local children could be excluded. Their argument was that Archer Academy was set up as a free, community-based school and that this principle was now being eroded.

The academy said a quarter of all places each year would still be offered on the basis of proximity. This figure was in addition to places offered to siblings living close to the school, it said, and meant N2 would continue to be fairly represented.

Concerns for other feeder schools

Parents from Brookland and Garden Suburb Junior schools attended in numbers and stressed that NW11 was one of the communities that the founders of the academy had identified as being in need of secondary places. Parents from the two nominated feeder schools in N3, Manorside Primary and Tudor Primary, expressed fears that their children still might not secure places.

Suggestions that the academy should expand and so solve the problem which had created the need for a new admissions policy were rejected by trustees on the grounds that the current site simply could not provide room for a bigger school.

Martin Bright closed the meeting by reminding everyone that no final decision had been reached and that the consultation process would continue until the

end of January. The meeting did, however, end on a note of unity: a general agreement that Barnet Council had for many years been negligent in not providing enough secondary school places in the borough.

The academy's final decision, the reasons behind it and the determined admissions arrangements will be published on the school's website by the end of March.

Letters special

Unsurprisingly, the proposals for new admissions criteria at the Archer Academy have generated a huge amount of correspondence. Here we are printing a Letters Special and we have edited some contributions in order to give as wide a cross-section of your views as possible.

Remember the original aims

Dear Editor,

After attending the public meeting and listening carefully to the arguments, many of which seem to have been put by parents at The Holy Trinity school, we would respond as follows.

First, if they are local parents who walk their children to school, as they say they are, their children will get a place at Archer Academy anyway, regardless of which primary school their children go to, as a number of places will be reserved for geographical catchment, irrespective of any other factors.

Second, having looked at the data for the last three years, Holy Trinity School parents have not supported the school in terms of choosing it for their children. In the second year's intake of the Archer Academy, for example, only six children from Holy Trinity school went to the academy. This compares with 31 from Garden Suburb School.

Third, an argument that was voiced several times was that the academy is discriminating against faith schools by not naming them as a feeder school. This is simply not the case. It is natural for schools of a similar ethos to reach out to each other. Would we really expect a Catholic or Jewish secondary school to name a non-denominational primary school as its feeder school?

The Archer Academy has been a victim of its own success and its catchment has shrunk dramatically. This year, just 13 Garden Suburb

children got a place, compared with 31 the year before. Intake data for 2013-2015 shows that Garden Suburb is likely to have just 1 or 2 pupils getting in in future years.

To fulfil its original aim, it is not only appropriate but necessary for The Archer Academy to give due priority to the originally identified primary schools where secondary school options are limited and which share their non-denominational and non-selective ethos.

Yours faithfully,
Chair of Governing Body and Chair of PTA at Garden Suburb Infant and Junior Schools.

N2 children will be bussed out

Dear Editor,

As a parent from Martin School I would like my son to be able to go to a non-faith, mixed school he can walk to so we were very grateful when the Archer Academy was set up. We were even more delighted when the school was sited just a six-minute walk from where we live. Feelings are running high from N2 parents. It became clear at the meeting that on the governors' estimate only 37.5 children who live the closest to the school will get a place plus the 15 Martin School places which have been allocated. And it is just an estimate; there are no guarantees.

We cannot now campaign for another free school. They have used N2 land and yet N2 people are going to be less likely to benefit.

Yours faithfully,
Name and address supplied.

Desperate need for places

Dear Editor,

The academy does not and will not fill the gap in the massive need for decent secondary schools in the area. The location of the school came secondary to the initial set up of the school. Premises in this area are scarce, it is only a coincidence that Holy Trinity is so close in proximity.

I don't think that the proposed new admissions process is exclusive and discriminatory, I feel that it is trying to be inclusive for the families in the area. The downside is that it highlights the desperate need for more local secondary schools. Recent statistics show that by 2020 there will be a shortfall of 540 places. This should not divide the community, but unite us to try to help our children.

Yours faithfully,
Zoe Spero,
Brookland Hill, NW11.

We don't want to move out

Dear Editor,

We are writing to give our support alongside a great many Brookland parents to the proposed changes to the Archer Academy admission policy. We went to the highly charged consultation meeting and were shocked by the behaviour of some of the very vocal parents who opposed the proposal.

The founders of the Archer Academy have created a fantastic school and, given the severe short-

age of secondary school places in the borough, it is inevitable that they cannot fulfil the demand.

So to remain true to their original vision of a school for the children in N2, N3 & NW11 they are proposing 55 of their 150 places be allocated to local feeder schools who share their non-selective, non-denominational, co-ed ethos. As Brookland parents we are in full support of these allocated places. We are extremely concerned that if we don't get them, we along with so many others will have very little chance of a secondary school which offers a similar ethos and standard for our children, and may have to consider moving out of the area.

Yours faithfully,
Fiona West and Debbie Myers-Anderson,
Address supplied.

Love thy neighbour

Dear Editor,

Why should pupils who live in East Finchley have to travel by bus or underground to another secondary school when they could just walk to the Archer Academy? Their only 'sin' is that they attended Holy Trinity School. That is pathetic. Grow up.

Yours faithfully,
S.M. Ertughrul,
Address supplied.

Still likely to get a place

Dear Editor,

The original objective of the Archer Academy was to plug the "black hole" in secondary provision in N2, NW11 and N3, with the drive to make this happen coming from families across all three postcodes. Its eventual N2 location means that any family living locally has a very good chance of obtaining a place for their child if they apply and make it their first choice.

Rather than causing division, the Archer Academy has brought the East Finchley community together and will continue to do so, providing an excellent local school for local children as originally intended.

The issue with Holy Trinity having feeder school status is that a child could get a feeder place at the Archer Academy based on the church attendance record of their parents at primary level. Many may feel that wouldn't be fair or be in line with the ethos of the Academy.

The Archer Academy Trust has worked hard to provide the community across N2, NW11 and N3 with additional high-quality comprehensive school places. With the estimated shortfall of secondary places in Barnet standing, I understand, at around 600, perhaps other solutions need to be found to meet this demand.

Yours sincerely
Helen Drake,
Former member of the Archer Academy campaign group.

My daughter's only hope

Dear Editor,

I feel very worried for my daughter's future in view of the secondary school situation in Barnet. The Archer Academy was set up to serve children in N2, N3 and NW11 but seems the catchment area is shrinking and I realise following the recent public meeting that my daughter will be unlikely to be offered a place with the current admissions policy.

I wholeheartedly support the new proposal of feeder schools as I think it will be her only chance of securing a place. I dread to think where she will end up otherwise.

Yours faithfully,
A very concerned N3 resident.

Academy is not the problem

Dear Editor

The Archer Academy was founded with the specific intention to serve three postcodes: N2, N3 and NW11. There is clearly not an abundance of development land in any of those locations. As it happens, the chosen site was in N2. However, this did not change the aim of the founders of the academy: to serve all three postcodes.

Without the proposed change to the admissions policy the academy will end up solely serving N2. This is not satisfactory. If, for example, a site had been found on the Heath Extension it would not have been right to allow the academy to become the preserve of NW11.

That said, under the new proposals, proximity will remain the largest factor for admissions. Therefore, N2 will remain very well served by the academy as feeder schools will only provide a minority of the intake.

Holy Trinity's admissions policy discriminates against children whose parents are not "involved in the work of and worship of the Parish of Holy Trinity or any other Church of England Church". As such, it would not make sense, given the academy's ethos, for Holy Trinity to be one of its feeder schools.

Faith schools and their discriminatory policies are part of the problem of schooling in our community. This has exacerbated a lack of secondary places for children who are not eligible on religious grounds. The Archer Academy does not discriminate; it is open to all. It is discrimination by faith schools that is the enemy here, not the academy.

Comments about "tearing apart communities" do not help advance the discussion and simply ignore the underlying problems. We need to turn our collective fire towards those actually responsible for the lack of quality secondary school places in our community.

Yours faithfully,
Nadim Meer,
Brookland Close, NW11.

Barnet Council needs to act

Dear Editor,

After attending the Archer Academy public meeting for its admission change consultation, one thing became very clear. There is a SERIOUS, devastating lack of good secondary schools in our area and borough as a whole.

Barnet Council has have known about this deficit for many years with its population projections and census information.

Tax-paying parents of children of a certain age are scared and worried that they will not have quality secondary education for an entire generation of children. To assume that there is another driven, energetic, talented group of parents out there willing to put their lives on hold for nearly a whole electoral cycle is madness.

It is not our job to do the work of our elected officials and those who work within the Department of Education; those who have the skills, resources and time to see these types of projects through to completion need to act now. The Archer Academy, while a fantastic school, is not a panacea. Barnet parents need help, desperately, and they need it now.

Yours faithfully,
Laura Pincus
Maurice Walk, NW11.