

The University of Birmingham School Admissions and Curriculum Consultation Response

1. Introduction

The University of Birmingham School carried out public consultation on proposals for the University of Birmingham School in Summer 2013, covering both the academic and planning aspects of the scheme.

The report of the pre-planning submission consultation and the University response can be read here: www.birmingham.ac.uk/university/university-school/building.aspx. The full report on the findings from the academic and admissions consultation can be read here:

www.birmingham.ac.uk/Documents/university/university-school-consultation-report.pdf.

This short paper sets out the initial response to recommendations by the University of Birmingham School. We would like to thank everyone who took time to give feedback on our plans- this has helped us to refine some of our ideas and will continue to feed into the School's development.

2. Curriculum

The consultation recommended that the School's curriculum provide suitable levels of support and stimulation for a full breadth of pupil interests and abilities, to meet the needs of a fully comprehensive intake. The School aims to provide a rounded experience for all. To do this, a highly experienced Principal, Michael Roden, has been appointed over a year ahead of the School opening. He will work closely with the School of Education at the University of Birmingham, plus colleagues across the University and across other schools, to develop a curriculum that emphasises academic achievement plus personal development for all pupils across broad range of subjects and encompasses extra-curricular activities and pastoral support. The School is maintaining a wide range of subjects for the lower school at ages 11 to 16 and will offer a broad but focused range of academic A-levels.

Some of those who participated in the consultation process were concerned that the School would direct all toward an A-level route, even where this might not be appropriate for the pupil. An essential part of the plans for the School's curriculum includes considering different pathways pupils will take within the School and beyond. Because of this, we are using expertise available to us from University academics and Careers, plus we will engage with other partner organisations, to ensure that the support we provide is first class for all.

It was clear that overall, the public was keen for the School to maintain a close relationship with the University. Throughout the project, we aim to foster a fruitful relationship between the School and the University. Pupils and staff at the School will benefit from the facilities at the University and will have access to academic resources across all disciplines.

The School will also, as part of the community of Birmingham Schools, work closely with different organisations across the city and region.

3. Admissions

While many of those who took part in the consultation process had confidence in the School's proposed nodal policy, clarity on the policy and how it would be implemented was needed. As a consequence, changes have been made to how the admissions policy has been written to make it more straightforward to read and understand. The admissions policy can be read here: www.birmingham.ac.uk/university/university-school/admissions.aspx. In addition, we are working on setting out a clear step-by-step guide to how the policy will actually be implemented and we will explain this to people at information events and open days. The guide will be published on the School website in due course, with a map showing the nodes.

The consultation showed us that we have not always clearly communicated to people why we picked those particular nodes. The Board of Governors listened to suggestions and feedback around the selection of nodes from individuals and organisations and considered whether to make any changes. It was decided, after a thorough review, that the chosen nodes did help to provide opportunities for a wide range of children to attend the School and would help to deliver diverse pupil population to reflect the city of Birmingham. The nodes also try to target areas of the city where it has been forecast by the Local Authority that there is a lack of school places in the future. At the same time, it is important that places are provided for the community living directly around the site itself who will experience the building and growth of the new School.

We have taken on board the feedback that we did not effectively communicate the reasons why we picked our nodes and consequently, as we update our website and prepare for information events and open days, we plan to provide more detail on this.

Concerns were raised about the distances that some pupils would need to travel to School, in particular those travelling from nodal areas other than the School itself. Once opened, the School will make a financial allocation to support pupils to use public transport to travel to the school, based on an annual analysis of need.

Some respondents questioned whether the intended pupil diversity would be achieved at Sixth Form. The Board of Governors was concerned that the application of the nodal policy at Sixth Form might deter some pupils from applying for places and the intention is that the Sixth Form be open to pupils across the city and region should they be interested in the curriculum on offer. Consequently, the policy has been amended and the nodal points have been removed for Sixth Form. Instead, once applicants have reached the required academic criteria, in the case of over-subscription, Looked After Children/ Previously Looked after Children and applicants with statements of Special Education Needs naming the School will receive priority, followed by pupils eligible for pupil premium (including service premium), and then random allocation.

4. Governance

During the consultation process, respondents were keen that the University maintained close relationship with the School but also that other key community members would be involved with the Board of Governors. This will be used to feed into the ongoing work on the governance arrangements for the School, which aims to ensure that the appropriate balance of representatives on the Board is reached, including parent representatives.

The Governance arrangements between the School and the University are still in development, informed by discussions with the Department for Education, the Charity Commission and the Higher Education Funding Council for England who all have an interest in the arrangements. Once finalised, these will be published clearly on the website.

5. Local considerations

See the University School website for recommendations in relation to local resident considerations, plus the University response to them: www.birmingham.ac.uk/university/university-school/building.aspx

6. Communication

It was clear in the consultation that it is vital that we share what we are doing and why with the wider community across Birmingham and the region. The appointment of the Principal over a year ahead of opening will help enormously with this and we are currently planning an updated website, and information events and open days to meet with parents, pupils and members of the community. Information will be available on the website: www.birmingham.ac.uk/university-school. We will continue to provide updates and indicate where we have responded to public feedback.