



3rd October 2018

Dear Parents and Carers,

I am writing to follow up on the meetings that many of you attended on the 19th and 20th September to discuss the proposal to bring William Parker and Helenswood together. I was pleased that so many of you were able to attend and share your views and your concerns about the potential impact of the proposal on your sons and daughters.

Attached to this letter is an updated FAQ document which includes all of the additional questions asked by staff, parents and the local community at meetings held so far. This is also available on the consultation website.

A number of parents have asked questions regarding educational continuity - particularly for students in Year 11. We are currently looking in detail at how the curriculum in a co-educational school would be structured and having heard parents' views, where possible, will endeavour to keep Year 11 students in their single sex classes, particularly in the core subjects. I also want to reiterate that students will continue to study the GCSE and A level courses that they have chosen.

If this proposal is approved, we will work with students, staff and parents to develop robust plans that will ensure a smooth transition. This will include a series of activities during the summer term that would bring the boys and girls together – and enable them to become familiar with their new environment ahead of the new school year. We would welcome thoughts and ideas from students, staff and parents on this as part of this consultation.

Many parents asked if we have looked at other proposals and I can assure you that we have. We have considered other options regarding the future of the two schools and full details of this are included in the FAQ document. Initially we had hoped to secure additional funding to enable us to consolidate Helenswood onto one site but unfortunately we weren't successful in this.

We have also looked at consolidating the whole school onto the William Parker site as an 8FE co-educational school. However, in discussions with ESCC it was made clear that a 12FE school was what was required – but we can't accommodate 12FE on one site. This is how we have reached this current proposal to create a 12FE school across two sites. This also gives us the opportunity to develop a dedicated Lower School that would smooth the transition from primary to secondary school – something that we are very excited about.

Executive Principal: Yvonne Powell, OBE

Questions were raised as to whether Ark has already made a decision about the proposal and I want to reiterate that this is a consultation. Once the consultation has finished, we will submit a report to the Department for Education, and they will make the final decision. The report will also be published on the consultation website.

Some concerns have also been raised about the proposal that the name of the school should be Ark St Helen's Academy. We need to find a way of recognising the history and identity of both schools and I would urge you to submit alternative suggestions as part of the consultation process. This is also a discussion that we are having with our students and the two student councils are meeting on Friday 5th October to consider other options.

Several parents have spoken to us about transport. We recognise that transport to and from school is important and we are meeting with Stagecoach as part of the consultation process to discuss the proposals and how this would impact on bus routes and timetables. If parents have particular concerns or envisage difficulties with transport we would encourage you to detail these on a consultation response form so that we can raise issues directly with Stagecoach.

The next meetings for parents will be on Thursday 11th October at 6pm, and on Friday 12th October at 10am. I hope you will attend to give us your views and to enable us to answer any further questions that you have regarding this proposal.

There will also be 20-minute bookable slots available on Thursday 11th October from 12noon to 4pm for any parent who would like to speak to a member of Ark staff individually about the proposals. These will take place at Ark William Parker for Helenswood and William Parker parents. Please contact the school office on 01424 439 888 to book a slot.

I look forward to continuing the discussion.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Yvonne Powell', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Yvonne Powell
Executive Principal,
Ark Helenswood Academy and Ark William Parker Academy