

## **Proposal to defederate Giffard Park Primary School from the MK Sapphire Federation.**

### **Introduction:**

This proposal is to give the required background and detail to allow the MK Sapphire Federation Governing Body to give their approval to defederate Giffard Park Primary School from the MK Sapphire Federation.

### **Background:**

Forward budgeting in early 2017 projected a gradual decline towards a deficit budget. In response to this the Giffard Park Primary School Governing Body and Headteacher began investigating how they could increase revenue, decrease overheads or both, to manage the school budget back from a projected future deficit.

The key factors to the budgetary issues were in the main down to

- MK Council's phased closure of the school's MLD department
- A decline in pupil numbers due to Giffard Park's location in the north east of Milton Keynes.

Giffard Park's location has historically caused issues with declining pupil numbers due to the perceived quality of the secondary school places available to local children. The secondary school preference of parents living in the Giffard Park catchment area is Ousedale School, however many of them reside in the catchment for Stantonbury International School. Parental perception of Stantonbury International School is that it has a mixed reputation, consequently many parents opt to relocate to go to alternative primary schools where they are in catchment for secondary schools, which parents perceive to be 'better'. The impact of these moves has effectively reduced the pupil intake for Giffard Park, where there is capacity for up to 420 children but currently only have 343 (May 2020) on roll; this equates to a substantial reduction in income.

Various ways to increase the numbers of pupils with different initiatives have been looked at but none were hugely successful. However the opening of a Preschool on the school site in September 2017 in a bid to secure future pupil numbers has been successful and now provides some 75% of Foundation stage intake. Another option was explored to restructure and reduce the number of teaching assistants and this took place in 2018. Both the Preschool and the teaching assistants' initiatives were managed with the LA Support services assistance and guidance.

The school during this period was also looking at Academies and Federations as possible options and the Chair of Governors at this time was also the LA Chair at another school where they were going down the route supported by the LA of federating two schools, this resulted in a reduction to expenditure across both schools with resource sharing, subsequent bettering of the children's outcomes and increase satisfaction for staff working across schools.

Given this experience and the fact that the school Headteacher and Chair of Governors also had a very positive working relationship with the Headteacher at Stanton and Pepper Hill schools, it was agreed that it could be beneficial to approach the Stanton and Pepper Hill Headteacher to sound out the possibility of Giffard Park joining the Stanton and Pepper Hill Federation. There were two informal meetings between the two Headteachers and the Giffard Park Chair, one in May 2017 with a further one in December 2017 to discuss the viability of such a move. The meetings were positive with discussions also around the Headteacher at Stanton and Pepper Hill becoming the Executive Headteacher (EHT) of the Federation and the Headteacher at Giffard Park remaining as the Headteacher at Giffard Park.

To progress this proposal, an approach was made to the then Leadership and Governance Consultant Governor Services to gain her input and this was then followed up with the respective Governing Bodies and the various parties who need to be involved to start and approve the process. This was carried out successfully with the result that an agreement was reached to proceed and the new MK Sapphire Federation went live in February 2019.

The Governing Body for the new Federation was put in place and the constitution of the Governing Body was set up with a mix of governors from respective schools.

#### **Expectations:**

With the bringing together of the three schools and with Stanton and Pepper Hill already federated there was an expectation, which was part of the initial discussions pre federating, that there would be major benefit across all schools for all involved including stakeholders.

These include;

- Resource sharing across all e.g. Finance / business management / learning mentors / safeguarding / SENCO / PE / computing / STEM.
- Joint management and use of external resources such as support services etc.
- Better procurement particularly, school maintenance / ground maintenance / cleaning etc.
- School improvement across schools particularly tied into resource sharing.
- Increased staff satisfaction and retention.

#### **Actual Outcome:**

The actual intended outcomes of the Federation for Giffard Park have in fact not materialised and the anticipated reductions in expenditure have not been fully realised. Furthermore, it has not proved possible to implement expected working practices. The school outcomes have been managed recently by Giffard Park on a standalone basis and they achieved a GOOD Ofsted in October 2019, measured against the new demanding Ofsted framework; the HMI was highly complimentary of the Headteacher and her Senior Leadership Team.

Working practices between the school and federation have reached the point where they are draining the capacity of the Federation and Giffard Park staff and governors and impacting on the ability of both organisations to function effectively.

In view of all these factors we feel that it would be beneficial for Giffard Park to defederate and return to the status of a standalone, maintained school.

**Way Forward for Giffard Park Primary School.**

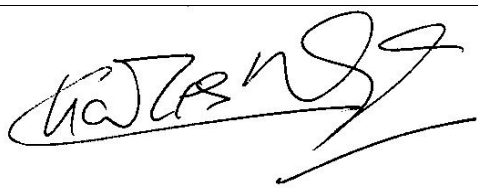
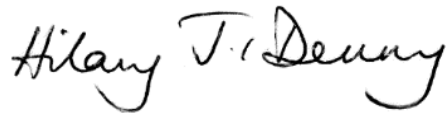
There is an evident passion about Giffard Park Primary School and it is recognised that becoming a standalone school again will require a very tight business plan for the current academic year and at least the next three years. The school is currently finalising budget plans to cover off finances and resources to ensure that children’s outcomes and welfare are safe. There is a confidence in the school that has followed on from their recent successful GOOD Ofsted and the fact that under the current Headteacher they have now had two GOOD Ofsteds.

The senior leadership team at Giffard Park continue to be hugely supportive as do all of the staff and we have no doubt that this will remain the case. A temporary Governing Body will be required for the standalone school, this will happen with key people in place to give the experience required to move forward. The school will also continue to use their excellent SIP and LA Support Services.

**Decision required**

In conclusion, we cannot see any benefit in continuing the federation arrangements with the MK Sapphire Federation. It would appear that the issues that have arisen cannot be resolved; leadership and governance capacity have been severely impacted and time that should be focused on further improving outcomes has been dissipated by the ongoing unresolvable issues.

After due and careful consideration, we wish to propose to the Governing Body of the MK Sapphire Federation that Giffard Park Primary School defederate from the MK Sapphire Federation.

	
Charles Rogers	Hilary Denny