

To the Parents at
Comber Grove School

Cllr Jasmine Ali
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Dear Parents

Comber Grove December Meeting

Thank you for taking the time to share your concerns with me on 6 December.

I am writing to you following our meeting to respond in writing to the main concerns that were shared with me. I appreciate how difficult this is for every child and every family and the meeting clearly demonstrated to me how important this is for everyone concerned.

I am so sorry that we had to meet under such difficult circumstances – thank you for taking the time to go through your thoughts and concerns. I want to assure you that I understand how upsetting it is to have to consult on the possible closure of a much loved school.

Consulting with parents to possibly close a school is something we are having to do because there are less pupils attending our schools, which government funding for pupils is not sufficient to cover the costs of running the school. Sadly, for the same reasons, a number of other London Boroughs are having to take the same action, but that in no way lessens my appreciation of how difficult this is for each and every one of you.

I want you to know that I will take all of your concerns seriously and we will do all we can to answer your questions and support where necessary.

When we met, parents were concerned about the place of the school in the community. I do appreciate how difficult this is for your community. All of our schools we hope are at the centre of their respective communities, and this closure will strengthen the viability of the remaining schools in the borough, ensuring the education that children receive in those schools will be strong.

Parents were also concerned about the work the school does with SEND pupils and the high percentage of them. The Council recognises the excellent work the school does with SEND pupils, but SEND pupils would benefit from a greater amount of resources than the school can afford due to low pupil numbers. Parents were also concerned regarding transitions for pupils with SEND and regarding children's well-being in moving to another school. In the event of a decision being made to close the school, a dedicated Admissions Officer will be provided to manage all transitions in close cooperation with the SEND team. This has worked smoothly with previous mergers and closures.

There was anxiety about the allocation of alternative places in the locality. In the event of a decision being made to close the school, a dedicated council officer will be deployed to assist in ensuring all pupils at the school transfer to a school of their choice where there is availability, and ensure this is within a reasonable travelling distance. I appreciate there were concern that nearby schools do not have sufficient places, or sufficient places of the right type. There are over 800 spare places within 0.75 miles of the school, across a variety of settings, including religious and non-religious schools. There are a further 400 vacancies at Lambeth schools in the locality. Schools with a religious basis with pupil vacancies cannot (and indeed do not wish to) turn children away. Once a child has been admitted to one year group, then the sibling rule applies.

Parents were concerned about the cost implications of a move to a new school, including transport and uniforms. A number of parents will be closer to a different school, and indeed, as there are numerous other Southwark schools within walking distance of Comber Grove, we do not expect parents and carers to have to take a bus to a new settings. In previous mergers and closures, assistance has been offered with new uniforms.

I hope this answers your questions. The consultation will close this month and council officers will collate all the feedback. A decision will be made in early January on whether we proceed with further steps towards possible school closure.

Whatever the outcome of the consultation - I want to assure you that you, your children, the school staff and governors will be held and supported by the council.

Best wishes, Jasmine

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jasmine Ali', with a small dot at the end.

Cllr Jasmine Ali
Deputy Leader Cabinet Member for Children, Education and Refugees