La Sainte Union matters to all four LaSWAP schools

Last week's front page told Camden families that four schools are "set to close". One of those schools, La Sainte Union, is part of the post-16 LaSWAP consortium. This partnership has existed between our schools for almost 50 years. The council has proposed a consultation, and for LSU it sets out a range of options, of which closure is only one. As the council paper says, no decision has been made. As the headteachers of Acland Burghley, La Sainte Union, Parliament Hill and William Ellis, we are clear that none of us wants LSU to close, and we are determined to work constructively with the council and LSU leaders and governors to make sure it does not.

That is why we took a deputation to the Camden Council Cabinet this week. We asked the council to:

- carry out a full impact assessment that looks at the consequences for all four schools, their students and staff, not only for LSU;
- give us time to develop alternatives, rather than treating closure as the likely outcome; and
- provide the support of officers and councillors so that we can do this together, and soon.

The four schools, and our governors, are ready to put in the work to do that. We want to address LSU's falling roll, protect Camden's largest sixth form provision and sustain what makes LaSWAP strong. We believe a creative solution exists. We ask the council to help us find it, and we ask parents and students to be patient, to listen to what the schools are saying, and to make their voices heard in the consultation.

We feel strongly because the consequences of closure reach well beyond one school. LaSWAP's longevity and popularity is one measure of its success: students study at their own school and move between sites for specialist subjects, and together we educate almost half of Camden's sixth formers. The offer is calibrated across four schools. It will not work in the same way with three.

Losing LSU would mean losing a quarter of that curriculum. That would not be a loss only for LSU students, because LSU's courses are open to, and taken by, young people from all four schools. The effect would be a narrower choice of courses for students across the consortium, and in time, some young people choosing to study elsewhere. That is why we believe the impact on all four schools needs to be properly understood before any decision is taken.

This is not only a sixth form issue. In our schools, curriculum planning and staffing span all key stages. A strong sixth form helps us recruit and keep specialist teachers, who value the opportunities of a large, collaborative post-16 offer, and that benefits hundreds of children in Years 7 to 11. For us, 11-16 sustainability and sixth form sustainability cannot be separated.

We take the pressures on Camden schools seriously. Falling rolls affect every one of us, ours included, and nobody is dismissing the council's concerns. The report is about numbers and finances, not about quality. Students at both LSU and LaSWAP achieve more highly and make better progress than almost anywhere else in the borough. But a decision that damages a partnership of this kind risks leaving all of us worse off, at a time when none of us can afford it.

We are also conscious of families making choices right now. Hundreds are considering LaSWAP this autumn, and an unresolved headline helps nobody. So, to be clear: for every current student and for those looking at LaSWAP in the near future, lessons, courses, exams and university applications continue exactly as planned. We do not accept that the arguments for making these changes quickly have been well thought through, especially given how sixth form recruitment works.

LaSWAP's strength has always been four schools working together. We intend to keep it that way.

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