

Committee: Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Date: 30th September 2020

Subject: Harris Academy Wimbledon update

Lead officer: Rachael Wardell, Director of Children, Schools and Families Department

Lead member: Cllr Eleanor Stringer, Cabinet Member for Education

Contact officer: Tom Procter, Head of Contracts and School Organisation

Recommendations:

A. To consider this update on the progress of Harris Academy Wimbledon School

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1. Harris Academy Wimbledon is the first new state secondary school in Merton for well over a generation. After opening in a temporary site in September 2018, it is due to move to its permanent site shortly and this report provides an update to Members.

2 DETAILS

Background

- 2.1. Following the rapid rise in primary school numbers in the late 2000s and early 2010s, the council identified the need for a new secondary school in the south Wimbledon area. Officers worked with partners to ensure the most cost effective means of providing the new secondary school. Harris Academy Wimbledon was approved for “pre-opening” status as a Free School by the Secretary of State for Education in spring 2015.
- 2.2. After the pre-opening approval the council worked closely with the DfE (Department for Education) and the Harris Federation. From the council’s basic need perspective, a September 2018 opening was essential as it was the year of exceptional growth from the cohort of children leaving primary school in summer 2018.
- 2.3. After extensive site searches by both the council and DfE it became clear that the only means to ensure the school would be delivered would be by the council working actively with its landholdings, and the complexities are well documented in council papers, including Cabinet in July 2016 and December 2017.
- 2.4. The council facilitated a clear site by early 2019 for the DfE to build the new permanent school at High Path in South Wimbledon for September 2020 and made available Whatley Avenue, SW20 (former Adult Education building) for Harris Wimbledon to open in a temporary site in September

2018. The capacity of Whatley Avenue only allowed two year groups of pupils.

Update

- 2.5. The building of the new site made good progress, and up to the Covid lockdown was on schedule to be completed in summer 2020, and therefore to be open for pupils in September 2020.
- 2.6. The build was then delayed by a short period of stopping work altogether, and then some Covid related supply issues. However, progress soon picked up and at the time of writing the expectation is that works will be completed in the latter half of October to enable the new school to move in during half term to open for pupils on 2 November 2020.
- 2.7. Due to the delay it has been necessary for the new year 7 pupils to be accommodated in the 6th form building at Harris Academy Morden, while the new year 8 and 9 pupils remain at Whatley Avenue. Although this is far from ideal, the Headteacher has reported that the pupils have settled in well, and it has worked effectively with dedicated transport funded by the DfE from south Wimbledon to Harris Morden.
- 2.8. The school staff and pupils are clearly excited to be moving into their new, purpose built facility shortly.
- 2.9. The school was over-subscribed again this year and has filled to its capacity. Contrary to some fears when the school was planned, in line with forecast demand, the roll of other secondary schools in Merton has increased since Harris Academy Wimbledon opened in September 2018. All secondary schools in Merton are largely full in year 7 again this year, with less than 5% overall surplus places.