

Frank Barnes School is a small sign-bilingual primary school for Deaf children. It is the only school within London for profoundly Deaf children where the curriculum is delivered directly in British Sign Language (BSL). Although the school is in Camden, our children come from all over London because of the specialist provision which we are able to offer. This is provision which profoundly Deaf children need if they are to have the opportunities which every child deserves.

The excellence of the education which Frank Barnes provides our children is recognized in the consistently higher results they achieve when compared with Deaf children educated in mainstream education. The School was awarded Beacon Status in 2001 and has since received two School Achievement awards. Our most recent OFSTED report gave the school a glowing endorsement, and graded us as good overall and outstanding in certain areas.

Independent research indicates the importance of language development in early years in qualifying life chances. It tells us that Deaf children taught using BSL do much better than Deaf children in mainstream education, however well supported. And it indicates the importance for Deaf children of a peer group and community to which they can relate if they are not to fail. At Frank Barnes, we believe fundamentally that Deaf children are entitled to have the same education as hearing children. We have a strong leadership team and excellent teaching and support staff, all fluent in BSL. Camden rightly recognizes that we enjoy an international reputation.

In October 2006, Camden announced that they needed the site on which Frank Barnes is located for a new secondary school. The Government is giving them nearly £200m. We are not against this new school. But we have always said that the need for a new secondary school cannot come at the expense of our children or of Deaf children who need our help in the future. And so Camden has been exploring various options for our future. Previously, it confirmed that we will not close. A number of options were on the table, including the creation of a new all age regional centre for Deaf education within London. But Camden cannot afford that on its own and other London boroughs have their own budgetary pressures. So unless the Government is prepared to act, the goal of a regional centre for Deaf education must wait.

We know that Camden is now coming to the conclusion that because Frank Barnes and its children stand in the way of its new secondary school, our school will have to close. They originally gave us 5 options for the school but these have now been reduced to two. One is a rebuild on a co-located primary school site in Camden and the other is to merge us with another School for the Deaf in Haringey.

At the moment, Camden say that they have only £1m, which is insufficient to rebuild Frank Barnes. That will cost between £4.5-5.5 million. Although Camden's preferred option is, they tell us, for the school to merge with the school in Haringey, it is clear that this will not meet the needs of our pupils. That school does not have enough places and is co-located with another primary school in unsuitable accommodation. It also has poor transport access and is too far away for our children. It would only work if the school was rebuilt as a regional centre. We fear that in the coming months, Camden will almost certainly recommend that Frank Barnes close and our children be absorbed into this school in Haringey, which is similar to a unit, and which we know will fail our children. Frank Barnes will be lost and all our expertise will be lost with us.

Before it's too late, we need people who care about the education of our children to act. The only reason Camden wants this school to close is to make way for its new secondary school. Frank Barnes would not otherwise be under threat. What Camden are really saying is that the need for a new secondary school means that Deaf children are less important than their hearing counterparts. We think Deaf children deserve an education and a future. Please help us to ensure that they get it.