

PROPOSED ALL SAINTS SCHOOLS TRUST

ACADEMY CONSULTATION

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS FROM PARENTS MEETINGS

Introduction

Consultation meetings were held for parents and carers at each of the five schools on the proposal to join the All Saints Schools Trust. The meetings took place over Tuesday, September 19th and Wednesday, September 20th.

This document is a summary of the questions asked at the meetings and the answers given. Where helpful, additional information has been provided in response to the questions raised.

STRATEGY

Q1. What is a Trust? (F)

The Trust will be a Company Limited By Guarantee with charitable exemption. This means the Trust must comply with both company and charity law and comply with its charitable Objects as set out in the Articles of Association (in simple terms - the rules of the Trust).

The Trust does not have shareholders and cannot pay dividends. Any surpluses must be retained to be spent in ways consistent with the charitable objects. The Trustees and Trust Members are unpaid.

It will have a Board of Trustees who are registered as directors at Companies House and Members who are listed in the Memorandum and Articles of Association. The Trustees are accountable in four ways. First, to the Secretary of State who has the power to intervene in the Trust and/or terminate the Funding Agreement that allows the Trust to run schools. Second, to Ofsted which has the same rights of inspection. Third, the Trust is accountable under company law with responsibilities such as publishing audited accounts. Fourth, the Trustees are accountable under charity law.

Q2. What is going to be different in the MAT regarding opportunities for staff recruitment and retention? (L) What will change? (F)

The Trust will offer the benefits listed below to staff, which should aid staff recruitment and retention.

- Enhanced professional development
- Joint planning with other teachers
- Resource sharing
- Access to subject specialists

- Share phase/year expertise
- Potential for Career progression within the Trust
- Support with workload management
- More job security

Q3. What is the minimum number for the MAT to work? (L) How many pupils in a MAT?(E) Will the Trust grow?(F)

The DfE specify that for a Primary MAT, there needs to be a minimum of 1000 pupils and or at least 5 schools. This current 5 school MAT has 600+ pupils, which is a good foundation and it will continue to grow in a sustainable way. The benefits of growth are increasing the Trust's resources, breadth of expertise and economies of scale.

Q4. If Wortham doesn't join, will the MAT still go ahead? (W)

Governors at the other 4 schools would need to consider the viability of the Trust if Wortham decided not to join, but the likelihood is yes it would still go ahead.

Q5. What are the options for joining the Trust now or at a later date? (F)

If the schools opt to join the All Saints Schools Trust now, they will be able to put forward Trustees and Members and be involved in the setting up of the Trust Board. If they do not join at this stage and then opt to do so at a later date, they would not be founding members and would have no involvement in setting up the Trust. More appropriate schools joining the Trust will be welcome (See Q3 above).

Q6. If Eye Primary didn't commit to joining now, what could happen in 2 or 3 years' time? (E)

The current government policy is for all schools to become academies. Although there is no obligation to do so, the financial pressures that individual schools are facing and the changing role and funding of the local authority, including the shift of control away from the local authority towards central government, will undoubtedly increase both the challenge of retaining and recruiting high-quality staff and securing adequate support for school development. In turn this makes the challenge of sustaining and improving school performance even tougher. If a school under-performs either in terms of public examination or test results or Ofsted judgement, they will be forced to become an academy with little control over the identity of the sponsoring multi academy trust.

Q7. Why can't the benefits be achieved outside of the MAT? Is it just financial? (L)

Formation of a MAT offers the opportunity to formalise existing arrangements and in addition, offers the following key benefits: long-term sustainability, formal governance arrangements, unifying charitable objectives, external accountability to the DfE (and others), collective accountability and responsibility for pupil outcomes, formal challenge for Headteachers, single commercial entity, single employer of all staff and single commissioner of services.

While the financial benefits (such as securing financial efficiencies through coordinated resource planning and joint commissioning of services) are important and in turn may facilitate some of these changes, they are not the sole or main driver.

Q8. How likely is it that a high school will join the MAT? (L) What about the advantages of a high school trickling down to primary schools? (L)

The pyramid is still really important so children know others going to High School. I hope that won't suffer if the MAT goes ahead. (W) How will the fact that each school is linked to a different secondary school impact on local arrangements? (E)

The MAT is being established as a primary partnership and as such it is unlikely that a High School would join. The 5 primary schools are feeder schools for 4 High Schools and will continue to work in partnership with these schools. The pyramid of feeder schools will continue to operate as before and transition to these schools will not be affected by joining the primary MAT.

Q9. Would the Trust consider becoming a Sponsor Trust? (E)

If there was ever the need, the Trust may feel a moral obligation to consider sponsoring a local rural school that was judged as underperforming to ensure its sustainability. The Trust have been asked to consider becoming a Sponsor Trust by the DfE

Q10. How will being in a MAT protect against school closures? (S)

What would cause a local school to close? (L)

Suffolk County Council consider any school with less than 60 pupils to be not financially viable. This has led to several recent primary school closures in the area. Once a school has become part of a MAT, the decision to close the school can only be made by the Secretary of State or the Trust itself. The LA are no longer in a position to close the school.

Q11. Would there be any restrictions to where the pupils could go if a school closes? (S)

No, this would continue to be down to parental choice.

Q12. How will new housing in the area impact on Eye Primary? (E)

When there is a new housing development in an area, the developers are obliged to contribute *planning gain funding* to secure capacity for school places. The school would be given this funding to enable it to build new buildings to accommodate the increased demand.

Q13. What are the safeguards around the characteristics of each school? (S)

What guarantees are there that we won't become a church school? (W)

We chose Wortham because it is a community school. If Eye, for example, expands then church schools will dominate. How will Wortham protect its ethos? (W)

How do community schools fit into the values of the MAT? (L)

The schools coming together to form the proposed MAT, all share the same set of common values. This includes recognising the values, ethos and individual identity of each school. The five individual schools combine to give a good blend of schools within the Trust. Wortham will remain a community school and will not be required to change status or ethos.

Legally speaking the Supplemental Funding Agreements are written specifically for each type of school, VA, VC or community. These give legal protection to the governance and designation of any school.

Q14. None of the other options considered have been presented. Of the proposal presented, none of the costs or risks have been outlined. (W)

The Governing Body of each school has a responsibility to determine the appropriate strategy for their school and has reviewed and considered a number of options before deciding to consult on the All Saints Schools Trust proposal. They consider this to be the best option for their school. Parents are able to access the minutes of the GB meetings if they are interested in seeing more information on how this decision was reached.

Q15. Why these five schools? (F)

Historically, these five schools have worked well together and four of the schools are strategic partners of the Primary East Teaching School Alliance.

Q16. If you join a MAT, can the school then leave if it doesn't work? (W) Can schools leave a MAT? (F)

Once a school converts to academy status it cannot return to Local Authority maintained status. If a school is unhappy then it is also quite hard to leave a multi academy trust once a school has joined, as it requires the consent of the Secretary of State for Education and the identification and consent of another multi academy trust. That makes it all the more important that the schools coming together to form the MAT share vision, values and ethos and spend time planning the detail of the Trust governance, leadership, finance and operation.

Q17. What happens when one school is different in nature from the other schools or starts to perform less well? (W)

If the Trust is required to provide support to an under-performing school, the Co-Principals will lead the coordination of resources to deliver the improvement plan, working with the other Headteachers. They would ensure that the existing schools would not be adversely affected by deployment of resources. It is worth noting that there is wide evidence that supporting an under-performing school is a highly effective form of professional development that enhances the skills and expertise of teachers or members of staff. This benefits their home school as they apply newly learned insight and good practice. There is also DfE funding available, which LAs cannot apply for, which MATs can access to help support school improvement work in underperforming schools. Differences between schools will be valued and add to the richness of the Trust.

Q18. What are the drawbacks of becoming an academy? (E)

In the short term, the drawbacks are the work involved for the schools in setting up the new financial systems and new governance systems that need to be in place at the time of conversion.

In the long term, once a school converts to academy status it cannot return to Local Authority maintained status. It is also quite hard to leave a multi academy trust once a school has joined, as it requires the consent of the Secretary of State for Education and the identification and consent of another multi academy trust. This is the key negative of the proposal, which is why the five governing bodies have been considering the Trust's governance, leadership and management so carefully. The aim is that everyone has a clear and consistent understanding of what being part of the proposed All Saints Schools Trust will mean for each school before joining.

Q19. A lot of the benefits are being realized already. Are you restricting opportunities to work with others when you become a MAT? (W)

Joining the MAT will not prevent a school from continuing to work with anyone outside the MAT if they choose to do so.

Q20. Are there benefits that we get now from the LA that we won't get as a MAT? (W)

Historically, the support from the Local Authority was good but following all the recent government funding cuts, this capacity has diminished considerably. They now charge for a number of the services that were once provided to the schools for free, so joining a MAT will not result in a reduction of un-costed service provision.

Q21. If we are staying as we are and only changing governance, then why bother? (W)

Informal partnerships are susceptible to changes in leadership or changes in focus at a particular school. Becoming part of a MAT formalizes these arrangements and ensures that they are sustainable in the future.

The changes in the external environment are a key influence in proposing a MAT. The Governing Bodies of each school want to be in control of the future of their schools rather than having changes imposed on them.

Q22. What are the measures of success? How will you know if you have succeeded? (E)

In the longer term the Trust will expect partnership working to impact on each school's performance including pupil attainment and progress. In the short term the overall performance of the Trust will be judged in terms of the success of Trust activities put in place for both pupils and staff.

GOVERNANCE & LEADERSHIP

Q23. In the governance model, how many roles are paid? (L)

The Co-Principals and CEO receive a salary for their executive roles. The role of Headteachers is salaried. All other governance roles are unpaid.

Q24. Are there set terms for the trustees and members? (L)

The term for a Trustee is 4 years. There is no term of office for a Member. They can however choose to resign or be forced to resign the role by the Secretary of State.

Q25. Will Head Teachers be appointed by Trustees (MAT)? (W) (S)

The Scheme of Delegation will propose that the appointment of a school Headteacher will be led by a panel comprising governors from that school, Co-

Principals and Trustees. The panel will have delegated authority to make a recommendation to the Trustees who will have final approval as required by the Trust Articles of Association.

Q26. Who will appoint staff to a school? (F)

The Scheme of Delegation will propose that the Headteacher will continue to have the responsibility for staff appointments within their school. The Headteacher for each school will be recruited as detailed above.

Q27. What are the risks around academisation & the influence of outside sources eg companies and privatisation? (L)

The Trust is bound by charitable law that prevents private companies taking a commercial interest or investing in the Trust. The Trust does not generate a profit and any surplus it achieves must be reinvested back into the Trust. The term ‘sponsor’ refers to the sponsoring of an underperforming school by the Trust, rather than commercial interest from a private company.

Q28. Will you (HT) have the time to spend in the schools? (L)

The Trust leadership structure is one of shared responsibility between the CEO, two Co-Principles and the two Headteachers, which avoids overburdening any Headteacher of any one school.

Q29. Can the Trustees refuse appointment on the basis of faith? (W)

Not in a Community school such as Wortham or for any of the central positions in the Trust. This would be unlawful. In theory for certain posts in a Church School the Trustees could do this

Q30. How does the role of the diocese affect the community schools? (L)

The Diocese has considerable involvement in the Trust Board because they own the land and buildings of the Church schools and have an interest in the control of their assets and maintaining the ethos of Church schools.

The Trust recognise the values and ethos of all the individual schools and both the community school and church school status of respective schools is legally protected by the designation in the Funding Agreements.

Community schools do not have any diocesan appointed governors on their local governing body.

Q31. Will land be sold off? (L)

No, the land is owned by the Church and LA and the Trust has no authority to sell off any of the land or use it as collateral.

FINANCE

Q32. How much will it cost to run an academy? (L)

The incremental costs of running the Trust have been estimated by the working group. In Year 1 schools will be required to make a modest contribution called the *Trust Central Charge*, which represents a very small percentage of their current budget.

The plan is that savings and efficiencies, achieved through joint commissioning and procurement of services that the schools currently purchase individually, will make the Trust self-funding in Year 2 or 3. Each of the schools has budgeted its forecast contribution. All schools will pay the same per pupil amount.

Q33. Will all schools keep the 'profit' from their pupil funding? (L) How does the finance work? (E) What will happen to school funding? (F)

Each school will continue to be funded based on the Suffolk County Council funding formula, which is agreed by a body called Schools Forum. Academies do not receive any further funding.

A key principle agreed by the schools is that each individual schools will retain their reserves and be allocated their full funding to plan their budgets, which will then be approved by the Trustees. Each school is required to make the agreed contribution to the Trust Central Charge.

Another key principle agreed by the schools is that each school must run a balanced budget. This is to ensure that funding is not diverted away from the pupils and school it is intended for. Failure to do so would lead to an intervention by the Trustees.

Q34. Where will the funding come from? (S) Where will the extra funding come from? (W)

Each school will receive £25,000 from the DfE to cover the costs incurred by conversion and forming the MAT.

Academies receive the same amount of per-pupil funding as they would receive from the Local Authority as a maintained school. The whole of the school budget would come directly to the MAT from central Government and then be distributed to the schools, allowing each school to control the whole of its spending.

Q35. How much is held back by the LA? (F) Will we get the LA money back? (L)

The LA will keep the de-delegated funding and additionally paid for services that they continue to provide.

SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

Q36. Will you have an administrative person for the MAT? (L)

The Trust will obtain additional support for the Headteachers and CEO for the additional responsibilities of running the Trust and will consider the need for Trust-wide posts over time.

Q37. Will staff be TUPE'd over? (L)

Yes, staff will go through a transfer of employment, under TUPE regulations. The TUPE consultation will take place later in the year if the proposed MAT plan is approved.

Q38. How will the MAT provide training that the LA currently provide? (L)

The impact of reduced school funding has meant that the LA has been unable to provide the training the schools ideally require. Forming the MAT gives the schools the opportunity to develop training schemes to meet their needs. The Primary East Teaching School Alliance is a good example of a way that valuable training can be organised.

Q39. Is sharing done after school or on PD days? (W) How are you going to make staff sharing work, if staff can't be forced to go to other schools? (W)

Teachers will use non-teaching time to share best practice. There will be no impact on their current teaching commitments and workload. Where staff are asked to work on Trust projects, workloads will be managed to ensure staff have the time to carry out the work. If staff are asked to take on Trust-wide responsibilities, then TLRs and temporary payments will be put in place.

LEARNING

Q40. How much has been done regarding areas such as curriculum development? (L)

Each school will remain autonomous and follow its own curriculum but will benefit from MAT-wide initiatives, for example, 'Super Readers'. Year group teachers and subject specialists within the Trust will be able to share best practice and help develop the curriculum across the schools.

Q41. How can ICT be improved across the schools – Where is the ICT teaching expertise? (W)

The Chair of the Trust Board is a Senior ICT Manager from Cambridge University. He is already looking at ways ICT provision can be enhanced across the 5 schools in the Trust.

Q42. Are you going to do anything to get the kids working together across schools? (W)

The schools are already very excited about the prospect of being able to bring children from the different schools together for a wide variety of Trust activities, including sports, performing arts, curriculum projects, residential trips etc. They are keen to develop these ideas and will be seeking input from the pupils themselves as to what they would want to see from the Trust. Each school has unique strengths and resources that can be shared across the Trust for the benefit of all pupils.

Q43. How does Wortham teach Religious Education? (E)

Wortham together with the two Church of England VC schools (Stradbroke and Fressingfield) will continue to teach the Suffolk Agreed Syllabus for Religious Education. All Saints Laxfield and St Peter and St Paul Eye will continue to teach a locally agreed syllabus in accordance with their VA trust deeds. There will therefore be absolutely no changes to how RE is currently being taught in each school.

PROCESS

Q44. How / when will the children be consulted on this process? (L)

There is no formal requirement to consult with the pupils at the schools. Each Headteacher will however, hold an assembly to explain the process to the children and ask them for their views

Q45. Is this a done deal? (L) What can be done to improve the consultation process? (L) Will we have another meeting? (L) Who will make the decision? Will Wortham governors vote on it? (W) Is the MAT a fait accompli? (W)

The consultation is running for four academic weeks from September 11th 2017 until October 6th 2017, which is standard practice for academy conversions.

The five Governing Bodies each have a statutory responsibility and authority to determine what is right for their school within the framework of relevant legislation, regulation and guidance. They are proposing the Trust because they believe it is in the best interests of the pupils, staff and wider community of each school.

Therefore, the purpose of consultation is to present the proposal, the reasons for it, the benefits and risks, and how the Trust will be governed, led and managed and gather feedback from stakeholders.

The Academies Act 2010 states that:

“Before a maintained school in England is converted into an Academy, the school’s governing body must consult such persons as they think appropriate.

The consultation must be on the question of whether the school should be converted into an Academy.

The consultation may take place before or after an Academy order, or an application for an Academy order, has been made in respect of the school.”

The five Governing Bodies believe that the planned consultation is robust and comprehensive. It includes publication of the proposals, stakeholder meetings, publication of meeting Q&As and an online survey accessible by all staff and parents.

The survey data will be an important part of the consultation report to be considered by each Governing Body. If there is evidence of significant objection from their parents and staff, then clearly each Governing Body will carefully consider this alongside the reasons and benefits of the proposal.

There are no plans currently to have a second consultation meeting but parents can continue to ask questions or request a meeting with the Headteacher throughout the consultation period.