

Edwalton Primary School: Consultation with parents regarding proposed conversion to an academy within the Flying High Trust

Wednesday 17 June 2015, 6:30-8:30pm

Presenters:

Brian Owens	Headteacher
Sara Dawson	Chair of Governors
Chris Wheatley	CEO of the Flying High Trust
Zoe Maxey	Director of Business and Finance – Flying High Trust
Graeme Robins	Director of School Improvement – Flying High Trust
Nick Layfield	Project Manager – Flying High Trust
Paul Bennett	Consultant to the Trust and former Project Manager

Attendees:

27 attendees in total including: parents, parent Governors, Vice Chair of governors and representatives of the local pre-school, kids clubs and Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust as members of the school community.

Overview of discussion:

Brian and Sara opened the meeting, presenting the background and reasons for the proposal to convert to an academy within the Flying High Trust. Key points:

- The process began in 2013 with the governing body researching the advantages and potential risks of becoming an academy.
- Research and investigation has included: attending conferences, visiting schools and academies, meeting with two multi academy trusts, all carried out over a two year period with academisation remaining as an item on the governing body agenda.
- The key driver throughout the process has been to safeguard the interests of the school, ensure the focus remains on school improvement and what is best for the children of Edwalton Primary School and ensuring that any partnerships entered into would protect and build on the unique features, identity and curriculum offer of which the school and its community are so proud of.
- The school has experienced the impact on the school of diminished LA capacity to support the development of schools due to their decreasing physical resource and focus on schools in categories.
- Edwalton Primary School was a founder member of the Candleby Lane Teaching School Alliance and have seen huge benefit, describing it as the most significant impact on school improvement the school has ever experienced.
- The governing body propose the conversion as it provides the school with the best opportunity to continue its development and retain its unique features.
- The school has also considered remaining within the Teaching School Alliance and Local Authority but feel that the depth of partnership does not enable the required level of support, challenge and accountability in terms of the LA. The relationship with the Alliance will continue based on the benefits the school have experienced as a result of this partnership and collaboration.

- The school has also considered becoming a standalone academy but have concerns regarding the level of isolation this could bring.
- The school have also considered joining the Rushcliffe Academy but felt that the school would benefit greater from working within a primary trust that shares the same vision, ethos and values as the school.
- The school has considerable experience of working with the Flying High Trust and have built a level of trust and also an understanding of the vision and the impact the trust has been able to have on schools that have joined.

Since identifying the Flying High Trust as a potential partner the school has:

- Arranged for the governing body to meet with the Trust to discuss a possible partnership, improve their understanding of the trust, ensure the trust has the capacity to deliver sustained school improvement and to ensure that the vision and ethos of both the trust and the school are in alignment.
- Visited Cotgrave Candleby Lane School (the founding member of the Trust) to meet with staff, children, parents and governors within the school to understand the Trust from the perspective of a member school and to see the vision and ethos in action.
- Carried out a two-way due diligence process. The Flying High Trust visited Edwalton for two days and carried out a full 360 degree review of the school, meeting with the Headteacher, governors, Senior Leadership team, School Council, Eco Council, parents, midday supervisors, TAs, office staff, site manager and carrying out lesson observations and assessments of every element of the school and its functions. This enabled the Trust to assess the school's strengths, ability to bring capacity to the Trust, the areas for development of the school and also the capacity of the Trust to provide the necessary support for school improvement. This due diligence also provided the school with the opportunity to assess the ability and capacity of the Trust to work with Edwalton Primary School.
- Held a governor vote to agree to proceed to recommending academisation and joining the Flying High Trust.

Following the outcome of the vote and the decision to proceed the governing body shared the decision with staff, children, parents and the school community. It was felt by governors that only once there was a firm decision to recommend academisation would consultation begin.

Overview of the conversion and consultation process:

- The school submitted an expression of interest form to the Flying High Trust. This document was approved by the Trust Board of Directors.
- The school submitted an Academy Order Application to the Secretary of State – it was noted that this is not a legally binding commitment to becoming an academy. Academy status is only confirmed at the end of the process when consultation is complete, the governing body confirm the decision to become an academy, all legal documentation is complete and signed and the Secretary of State issues the Funding Agreement.
- The Flying High Trust carried out the due diligence visit – providing what Brian Owens described as the most comprehensive review that has been undertaken at the school, informing the school improvement plan for the next two years.
- Edwalton entered into the consultation period of eight weeks. During this time the school will consult with staff, parents and the wider school community. This consultation includes emails, in person communication, formal consultation meetings, letters and the conversion section of the school website. It is important that everyone has the opportunity to contribute to the process which remains open until 14 July 2015 – please keep the comments, questions and suggestions coming. The governing body will respond to all questions individually and also ensure that these are included on the school website.
- Following consultation the governing body will review all feedback to inform the final decision to proceed.
- The legal process is already underway (though once more, not legally binding) and draft documentation is being produced with reference to the lease on the building and land (Flying

High Trust would enter into a 125 year lease), the Commercial Transfer Agreement (overseeing the transfer of resources and personnel to the Trust, under the conditions of TUPE which protect the terms and conditions of transferring staff), the Scheme of Delegation (detailing the roles and responsibilities of both the governing body and the Trust) and the Funding Agreement (the final document in the process).

- As a governing body we will provide updates throughout the process via the website.
- If the process proceeds this should see Edwalton Primary School convert on 1 September 2015.

The Flying High Trust then presented to the meeting – please refer to the separate presentation slides for content.

Questions raised at the meeting:

How would becoming an academy impact on our relationship with local schools and Rushcliffe?

The move to an academy would not impact on the relationship with our family of schools in the area or with transition arrangements for our pupils moving to secondary school. As the Trust shared at the meeting on Wednesday they actively encourage the development of this network as it is essential for our development. Brian also confirmed that these relationships will continue and that transition activities will continue as is the case this year.

One of the possible benefits of conversion is greater autonomy with regard to the curriculum. What could this mean for Edwalton?

In the short term there may not be any significant changes to the broad and rich curriculum of the school. This autonomy gives the school an opportunity to review the curriculum to ensure that the content and way in which it is delivered can be adapted to best meet the needs of the children of Edwalton. A practical example of the use of this autonomy has been seen at Candleby Lane where the school identified that many of the pupils required support in developing their confidence, aspirations and employability focus. To meet this need the school introduced Candleby Life – every Monday the pupils come off timetable and “go to work”. They apply and are interviewed for jobs and go to work within school and working with local businesses and community groups. This has had a huge impact in raising aspirations and promoting opportunity.

How does governance work within the Trust?

What delegated powers will the local governing body retain?

What will be the representation of the Edwalton governing body on the MAT?

FHT is a local Trust not geographically removed from its schools and is absolutely committed to school improvement and all schools achieving their very best. The Trust operates a policy of earned autonomy so good and outstanding schools have greater powers delegated through the Scheme of Delegation. The Trust is in a position to be more locally responsive to schools than the Local Authority and provides the school with greater influence over not just the school but the overall running and development of the Trust. As a good school Edwalton will be represented on the Trust Board by the Chair of Governors to contribute to and influence decision making in a way that is not possible within the LA. The Board meet three times per year and the Chair of Governors for Edwalton will also attend working groups focussing on Finance, Personnel and Resources and also Pupils, Standards and School Development. Brian as Headteacher will also sit on the Trust Strategic Heads Group which meets every three weeks to focus on strategic development, operational issues, support and sharing of practice and opportunities. What has been clear from the very start is that the Trust value our uniqueness and that the ethos and values of Edwalton are very much reflected in those of the Trust.

This came through strongly in the two-way due diligence that was carried out in identifying the alignment of ethos, values and principles. In terms of the powers delegated, as a good school Edwalton will continue to be responsible and accountable for the appointment of Headteacher and staff, setting and reviewing the curriculum, site and premises, ethos and values and support and challenge of the school through the Local Governing Body. The governing body has these powers delegated through the Scheme of Delegation and the governors have had the opportunity to review and suggest amends prior to the signing of this document. The governing body is content with the delegated powers and influence on school and Trust development and feel that this places us in a stronger position than is currently the case within the LA.

Exactly what additional autonomy will academy status bring and how does the governing body envisage using it to enhance the provision or secure the ethos of the school?

Can the governing body or Flying High Trust explain why freedom from the LA will enhance the ability for innovation? What are the barriers currently preventing this from occurring?

What innovation does the governing body wish to pursue that it is currently hampered in achieving?

The Local Authority does not necessarily hamper innovation however it does not have the capacity to drive innovation due to its reduced resource and focus on schools in categories. The additional autonomy does however bring with it the potential to mould and shape the curriculum to best meet the needs of our children. Working with the Flying High Trust enables closer working through the Strategic Heads Group across all member schools to provide greater opportunity for our children such as joining initiatives like the Trust Children's Parliament. The Trust provides a more powerful group of partners for innovation and opportunity for collaboration, creativity and action enabling Edwalton to work within a more proactive group of like-minded schools sharing and developing innovative practice.

The MAT currently only contains one none good or outstanding school out of five – clearly it will be expected to increase its sponsorship capacity and take on more failing schools given the policy of the current government – what impact might this have on the resources (financial and human) of the remaining partner schools in the Trust and within the salaried staff of the Trust itself – e.g. will it need to recruit more staff?

The Trust is absolutely committed to only taking on schools where they have the capacity to support them without this becoming a risk to the Trust or other schools within the Trust. Any growth is subject to agreement both within Strategic Heads Group and also approval by the Board of Directors. The Trust have to date turned down schools due to either capacity or because the school did not share the same ethos and values. Any planned growth would bring additional resource and therefore the Trust could look to bring services in-house such as HR but also look at school based roles including behaviour specialists and educational psychologists. All of which would be approved through Heads Group and the Board.

We hear about the use of unqualified teachers being used in academies as a cost saving measure – would this be the case at Edwalton?

The Trust can guarantee this would not be the case, and is not the case within any of our current Trust schools. The Trust is absolutely committed to school improvement and this cannot be achieved without ensuring the best staff and opportunities for our children. Brian confirmed that the only unqualified teachers in the school were the music club, Rattle n Roll, brought in to teach music to small groups of children and that the school do anticipate this continuing.

How does the Trust work in terms of investment in buildings?

Currently the Trust bid for EFA funding in the same way schools do. The Trust work with a company that has a 92% success rate in securing EFA funding. Currently the Trust has expansion and improvement works being carried out at four of the schools due to funding secured in this way.

When the Trust grows to over 3,000 pupils (approx. 10 schools) the Trust will then enter into formula based funding and will utilise conditions surveys as part of its overall estates strategy (the Trust is currently tendering for a company to provide an overall estates strategy. The Trust will then review the needs of each school and work to a priority based estates strategy. Three of the Trust schools are new builds so this would put Edwalton in a strong position for building development.

Does the school plan to continue its relationship with the out of school club?

Absolutely. The school has developed excellent working relationships and long may this continue!

Is the Trust prepared for Multi Academy Trust inspections?

Chris Wheatley (as CEO) passed the recent Ofsted, new framework, assessments and is also working with the national lead on MAT inspections and with the Regional Schools Commissioner on what makes an outstanding MAT so is very much involved in this agenda. The Trust is also arranging for an external "Mocksted" during 2015-16.

How does the Trust measure school improvement?

- Annual health-check visits (similar to an Ofsted visit) or a Mocksted visit
- Working with Headteachers on the development of their School Improvement Plans
- Ofsted measures
- Half termly risk meetings
- Working with Headteachers at the Strategic Heads Group
- Board working groups
- Chair of Governors and Trust meetings
- School improvement visits – support and challenge
- Headteacher performance management by the CEO in conjunction with the Local Governing Body
- Sharing of good practice
- Supporting talent management and opportunity across the Trust – ensuring development and retention
- Working with the Teaching School Alliance to make sure CPD opportunities meet local need
- Annual review of progress
- Working with other Teaching School Alliances to ensure an external check on all our work and progress – external verification
- Ensuring children meet and exceed age related expectations
- Working with schools on their capacity to support others

Why would joining the trust help with the recruitment of teachers?

Through the Candleby Lane Teaching School Alliance the alliance and Trust are able to support the development of our talent management, succession planning and ensuring we provide development of all staff including career progression. The alliance runs the SCITT for training new teachers, offers

NQT support, CPD opportunities, and also runs the National Professional Qualification for Middle Leaders (NPQML), Senior Leaders (NPQSL) and for Headships (NPQH) for the East Midlands. This enables the alliance and Trust to develop teachers and leaders at all stages of their career and to support schools in matching expertise and skills with opportunities and vacancies.

The Trust work with their schools on joint recruitment, identifying talent and supporting them in achieving their career goals whilst also ensuring succession planning across the Trust. The Trust look to offer conditions that ensure staff are well-motivated and rewarded for their contribution. The aim is to become an employer of choice so that the best teaching and non-teaching staff want to work for the Trust and to remain within the Trust once appointed. As a partnership of schools we are well placed to ensure talent management and to help staff to achieve their ambitions within the Trust. The Strategic Heads Group work together to identify risk and opportunity to ensure a collective approach to retaining and developing the best staff.

What vision does the trust have of the number of schools it would ultimately have?

The Trust ensures all growth is based on the capacity of the Trust and member schools to provide the required support to develop all schools within the Trust. To date the Trust have turned down applications from schools due to either concerns regarding capacity to support and for the school to provide support or due to a lack of a commitment to the ethos, values and principles of the Trust. All decisions on growth are based on capacity and reviewed through the Strategic Heads Group and the Board of Directors, both of which Edwalton will be represented on. As part of the growth and business development plan the Trust have mapped out the support and staffing they would require for particular stages of growth, for example, for every eight schools the Trust would require an additional Director for School Improvement to ensure capacity for providing the level of support the Trust is committed to.

How can the trust support the school if more than Edwalton convert in one go?

The Trust has previous experience of supporting more than one school through the conversion process within similar timescales. The Trust recruited a full-time Project Manager in March 2015 to take the lead on conversion on behalf of the Trust and also have a full-time Director for Business and Finance and the support of the CEO on conversion. Each School Business Manager / Office Manager is partnered up with a recently converted academy to support them through the process in practical terms, also ensuring a smooth transition into the Trust. The Trust are available to attend meetings as required and to provide email and phone call support throughout. Sara Dawson confirmed that the support to date on conversion has been excellent. Currently the Trust are supporting three schools towards a conversion date of 1 September 2015.

How do the Trust ensure that it maintains its current ethos and allows the school to maintain its own identity?

The Trust operates on earned autonomy and partnership, working with the school on agreed development needs. As part of the due diligence process a key focus is on the vision, values and principles being reflected by those of the school (and vice versa).

Through the Strategic Heads Group, Board of Directors and Trust and Chair of Governor meetings the partnership holds each other to account on the importance of maintaining the vision and ethos of the Trust.

The values of the Trust are promoted through each school in terms of expectations but also practically in terms of the Trust Children's Parliament and annual Trust Awards evening as well as through the schools promoting the values within school.

The Trust has just launched its Trust Evaluation Form and Trust Improvement and Partnership Plan and part of this is driven by an annual survey completed by governors, Headteachers, staff, parents and children enabling all stakeholders to hold the Trust to account, ensure it remains true to its values and ethos and to support the collective development of the Trust and vision.