

The Unitas Collaboration

Parent Acadmisation Consultation Meeting 10 January 17

Questions

Q – Don't you think the proportion of church members is disproportionate to the number of children in church schools?

A – This is the only way to secure church schools in the MAT as it protects the church's interest in the faith schools. If the members were concerned the Christian ethos of church schools was being diluted they could step in and prevent this. The function of members is limited to receiving accounts annually from the directors and appointing the directors who run the MAT

Q – Don't you think this is disproportionate the other way?

A – A guarantee for the community schools will be written into the legal agreement. Reiterated the Diocese are protecting the ethos of the church schools. DfE can (and will) intervene if there is any concern about the impropriety of any faith in MAT

Q – What is the requirement at director level?

A – Members appoint the directors. The schools put forward recommendations for directors who are formally approved by the members. Directors are appointed for a defined skill set to fulfil their roles. School's would seek to maintain continuity by appointing current governors as directors

Q – What happens if the Diocese doesn't approve the directors?

A – The Diocese do not have a bank of trustees and school's will recommend the members to be appointed on their behalf

Q – Will current governing bodies be maintained

A – Local governing bodies will be maintained consisting of elected parents and staff members in addition to foundation governors in the church schools

**Q – Where is the money coming from to convert and to pay the project manager?
What will the financial benefit be to Borden Primary?**

A – DfE funds the conversion costs to £25k maximum for each school. Thus far, no school has converted into a MAT at a cost in excess of this. There is a very real danger that in a situation where a single school chooses to become a standalone academy that the cost could exceed £25k. No money is received prior to application to become a MAT and at the point of application discussion would commence with lawyers regarding cost. Chairs of governors would not take any decision which would have a detrimental effect on their own school's budget. In real terms, financially schools have lost 8% of their income over the last 7 years with the flat cash system introduced by the government. Deficits are arising in all schools. Church schools do not receive any funding from the church other than for repairs to premises. Borden did receive money from the parish council towards a very specific project and converting would not affect their ability to request this in the future. All schools will retain their individual budgets but the real term cuts mean that it is unaffordable for small schools to retain a non-teaching Headteacher. The financial benefits are the economies of scale already being sought by the business manager which would continue. Schools are no longer being forced to academise but local authority maintained schools do not have access to the funding streams that academies now do. Post conversion the MAT could apply for grants not

currently open to us. The local authority is rapidly disintegrating and by September 2017 education services will be traded. For example the school improvement service, which is currently provide free of charge, would be become chargeable.

Additional answer from parent – Schools need to be in control of their own destiny as the local authorities continue to shrink. In another Local Authority only 35 local authority schools remain out of 110. Schools who are considered to be failing by Ofsted are forced to academise and have no control over who the sponsor is. Currently even faith schools have their budget top sliced to pay for local authority education services. As a MAT the schools' will have far more control over the services they chose to use EG HR, finance and school improvement obtaining better value for money and often cheaper than using the LA

Q – This reminds me of the old grant maintained system of education. Will the income be ring fenced in anyway?

A – Nothing is defined by the government about how it should be spent. The MAT will receive formula funding directly from DfE rather than from the current system from the LA. MATs directly receive additional funding currently used by LA to fund central services. Some additional funding will remain ring fenced such as pupil premium, SEN, PE grants and UIFSM. The MAT will have to demonstrate how it uses such funding which is exactly the same as the current system for LA schools

Q – If there will be one pot of money aren't the big schools at risk of bailing out the smaller schools?

A – Central costs such as Executive Headteacher salary, would be taken from a central pot. All four schools would receive their allocation of funding less the central costs. Revenue budgets will be formulated on the same basis from pupil numbers. Individual schools can bid to DfE if they feel the MAT is treating them inappropriately. DfE have a Condition Improvement Fund from which academies can bid for funds to improve their buildings. Much larger MATs (in excess of 5k pupils) receive a formula allocation from the CIF. There would not be a situation of 'bailing out' a school in financial difficulty.

Q – What additional costs do you for see as a self-reliant trust?

A – School improvement. The cost of this is currently top sliced by the LA and the MAT would offset this cost from monies received directly them for such costs. The MAT would also need to appoint an auditor and pay for a trust level set of audited accounts at the cost of approximately £12k per annum. Again, this cost would be offset but the monies received previously paid to LA to provide their central services. Some of this cost could also be offset by less work needed by Schools Financial Services

Additional answer from parent – Most schools already buy into HR and legal services as traded services and continue to do this as initially no alternative. Once established this will cost less as a MAT as the costs are calculated on a sliding scale per head basis

Q – On the question of governance the scale doesn't equal the voice. How will the small schools be heard?

A – all schools will have an equal status with local governing bodies represented on the trust board. EHT fully understands the pressures on small schools. Equally there will be no pressure on the big schools to bail out the small schools. EHT wants to be trusted to do his best for all the schools. Each school will be in control of its own destiny and will not be forced into doing something they don't wish too. The current strategic board was established with representation from each school and have learned a lot about each other's schools through

the process. Good practice and financial benefit has been established alongside the development of the existing collaboration. All four governing bodies have spent the last year looking at options to secure the future of the collaboration and the last six months discussing formal options. All four full governing bodies voted unanimously to convert to MAT status. Obviously if the overwhelming majority of parents object to conversion the governing bodies will have to reconsider their decisions. Parents are asked to carefully consider what has been said at the meeting and weigh up all the options. There is no pressure on parents but they are urged to look at Google Map – School’s map which gives a realistic overview of the impact of funding changes to individual schools within the next three years.

Q – Will the MAT be forced to take on other schools requiring improvement?

A – The trust board would carefully consider any requests and carry out due diligence and likely impact on the existing schools. Staff will not be moved around between the schools like chess pieces as EHT feels that it would cause instability within schools. However, there will be opportunities for staff to move should they wish too. For example, middle leaders that are being developed could move into senior leader positions with appropriate professional development, as vacancies come up. There would always be very careful consideration for staff movement to ensure stability of staffing. All schools are on the trajectory to outstanding so that all the children get the very best education possible. DfE can ask the MAT to take on a school requiring improvement but would understand if the trust board’s decision is no.

Q – I need to fully understand the financial benefits and economies of scale as I thought the schools were already benefiting from this?

A – There will be greater funding and leadership opportunities. Minterne and Oaks staff are already benefitting from middle leadership development opportunities. Skills learned by middle leaders enable them to progress to senior leaders. There is still a recruitment crisis in education, therefore growing our own future leaders is sensible. Parents will not see any noticeable changes. For example, uniform and school names will not change. A positive change would be a greater range of opportunities to enhance development. Funding opportunities for LA schools are diminishing EG Kent Association of Headteachers and schools wont be affordable in the future. DfE via the Regional School’s Commissioner have the funds to develop future leaders so schools are being forced down the academy road by lack of funding opportunities for LA schools

Q – Will the Swale Speech and Language Unit be affected?

A – The Swale Speech and Language Unit will play a full part in the trust as all the children who attend the unit are on roll at either Minterne or the Oaks. All the children’s ECHPs are funded by KCC and this will not change. Additionally KCC will continue to be responsible for the placement of the children into SSLU. The unit will not be moving to Bredgar. In fact, KCC have just agreed to fund the aging buildings with a new modular build at no cost to the schools. The modular buildings are second hand but they have barely been used. Planning permission has just gone out for consultation and 3 trees have had protection orders placed on them which will slow down the planning process. The new buildings will be in roughly the same place in an L shape will all classes interlinked. A covered walkway from the unit to Oaks is under discussion

Q – What affect will the proposed development on 600 houses on Wisles Lane development in Borden have?

A – If the proposal went ahead it will include the plans for a free school. As only MATs can sponsor a free school it is in the church's interest to protect Borden. If our MAT does not go ahead then an established trust would be asked to sponsor the new school. The Diocese are in negotiation with the developers. The Unitas Collaboration has not had any involvement in negotiations.

Q – Will the finances affect the teaching staff? Will they have more pressure on them and greater workloads?

A – Other than greater opportunities for career development there should be no noticeable difference. The establishment of a MAT would not create additional paperwork for them

Q – Will the TAs get a pay rise? A TA left because she was not able to access an increase in her salary.

A – Staff choosing to leave is beyond our control. Nobody including EHT will get a pay rise from the establishment of a MAT. The EHT's salary is capped and will remain so. Some MAT CEO's earn appalling sums of money at the cost of the children in their schools. Teachers and support staff receive cost of living pay rises in line with public sector increases and subject to rigorous performance related pay. It has been subsequently confirmed that the member of staff in question left because the school was unable to offer additional hours, it was not about a pay rise.

Q – What is the proposed timescale for conversion?

A – Six months is the average. If the MAT is established prior to the end of the academic year each school would retain its share of the ESG (central services pot currently £77 per child) but that is not an underlying factor for conversion. Upon conversion the MAT can apply for a primary chain grant.

Q – How long does the consultation run?

A – Until the 10th February. Parents are able to return their comments online via survey monkey or via email to their child's school office. There will be an additional consultation process for staff. After which each governing body will consider the responses and feed back to the strategic group.

Q – Has the application already been submitted?

A – No

Q – Is there any plan to include a secondary school into the MAT?

A – No. This isn't possible without coming under the umbrella of an existing trust

Q – Will the admissions process changes? Can there be formal links with a secondary school so that Unitas children are guaranteed a place at Fulston?

A – Admissions process will remain unchanged. 95% of Unitas children already get their first choice secondary school and without joining an existing MAT the admissions to any secondary school cannot be guaranteed. An additional secondary school is planned in north Sittingbourne (Bobbing/Kemsley)

Q – Is there any plan to build an empire and take over the world as some MAT CEO's have?

A – The EHT is not predatory. Every school that has joined the collaboration has approached the EHT in the first instance. If schools approach the MAT each would be carefully considered. Currently there have been enquiries from other schools but we are still a four school collaboration. EHT has no plan to rule the world.

Q – Will the school holiday change?

A – No plans to change the structure of the holidays. All collaboration schools link their inset days already.

Q – Who will be the trust responsible to externally?

A – The Secretary of State via the Regional School's Commissioner and Ofsted

Q – Who can parents complain too if not the LA?

A – The LA have relatively little ability to respond to complaints and enforce change. Parents would complain to the school, the trustees and Ofsted following the complaints policy which is available to parents in every school.

Additional response from parent – There are lots of horror stories in the press regarding MATs. The reality is vastly different. Failing schools have already been forced to convert and now the good schools need to control their own destiny.