

The Spinney Primary School Q&A - February 2018

Reflecting discussion at the consultation meetings and questions / comments asked/made by staff and parents in all 3 schools – Mayfield Primary School, The Spinney Primary School, Fulbourn Primary School.

A Business Model?

Q: Do the governors recognise the risks of turning education into business where by its nature there are always winners and losers? What do they consider the biggest challenges to be in this proposal?

Q: As a business model, and given that private business can fail why would turning education into one be of benefit to its pupils?

Q: Would the Trust be run as a limited company?

Q: Would it be possible to sell the school grounds?

A: An academy is a charitable company limited by guarantee; the directors have duties as directors under company law and also as trustees under charity law. However, instead of registering with the Charity Commission, academies are regulated by the Department for Education. The Charity Commission can, however, investigate if it thinks charity law is not being adhered to.

The DfE directs that: "The academy trust's principal object is to advance for the public benefit education in the United Kingdom, in particular but without prejudice to the generality of the foregoing by establishing, maintaining, carrying on, managing and developing a school offering a broad and balanced curriculum." i.e. it cannot be converted into some other sort of business.

Other than the CEO the directors are not paid and there are very strict rules about other financial benefits e.g. via supplying materials or making loans. They are accountable for the educational outcomes and welfare of students, the welfare of staff, and for the financial security of the school in the same way as the Governors are now. They are not running the Trust with the aim of creating a profit or benefiting themselves, and they are not in competition with other MATs. So their sole focus is to provide an excellent, safe and sustainable education for children.

Transparency is maintained via a performance and financial audit which is published on the Trust website – examples can be seen on the websites of current Trusts.

The individual schools are inspected by Ofsted. Where academies, or their governors or a sponsoring school are underperforming the Regional Schools Commission will take action.

The land and premises are not given to the MAT but leased for 125 years. In practice the land cannot be sub-let or sold without the permission of the DfE, the LA and the MAT which is a greater degree of protection than we have now. In addition our land is a protected green space for recreational use which prevents use for development.

As in the current maintained system, academy schools can set their own pay scales. In practice, restrictions on budgets prevent pay awards being greater than the recommended standard and a desire to recruit and retain staff prevents pay awards being less than that standard.

Governance

Q: On the Innovation Trust website there is no specific information as to what each Local Governing Body will be able to decide on/be responsible for. Please can you provide specific information on this? What will be the relative power between the LGB and the MAT Board?

Q: What will the role of the governors be of each school once this move is made? There must be some outline/idea as the move to being part of a MAT is nearly there so you all must have spoken about it.

Q: The benefits of IT sound good but on their website there is no specific information e.g. on governance.

A: Whilst the guidance given to schools setting up MATs has changed & improved significantly, there are a variety of approaches and we've had to find our own way. There are MATs at the two extremes with no local bodies (which we think is wrong as they're too distant from both the schools and communities) and those where the local bodies do everything (which questions what value the MAT can add).

Speaking to other MATs and schools going through the process we feel we've found a good balance, in summary:

- *MAT Board provides oversight over the CEO & Trust Improvement Group and deals with the bureaucracy common to all schools*
- *CEO takes over performance management of the schools, putting performance management back into the hands of teachers*
- *Heads remain responsible for running their own schools*
- *Heads work together as a "Trust Improvement Group" on the school development plan*
- *Local governing bodies, called Academy governing bodies, continue with a simplified remit losing the above pieces, allowing them to focus on teaching, learning & local community, monitoring, staff and pupil wellbeing, community engagement, consultation and assurance functions.*
- *The local governing bodies are a democratic team of volunteers representing their community and stakeholders. They are regularly present in each school, consulted by the Head teacher and monitoring each academy's performance. Each governing body needs to include at least two elected parents, and at least one elected member of staff. They report to the Trust Board.*

Delegated functions include:

- *Building an understanding of how the school is led and managed*
 - *Monitoring whether the school is:*
 - *Working within agreed policies*
 - *Meeting the agreed targets*
 - *Managing its finances well*
 - *Engaging with stakeholders*
 - *Ensuring wellbeing of the head teacher(s), staff and pupils*
 - *Being a point of consultation and representation*
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- *Head teachers continue to consult with Academy Governing Bodies:*
 - *Head teachers would have to demonstrate in their performance management with the CEO how they have utilised the views and expertise of the AGBs*
 - *We would use shared and aligned processes and tools used by Academy Governing Bodies for monitoring each Academy; so that the same elements could be used to share between academies and to report to the Trust*

- *Academy Governing Bodies can escalate issues and concerns to the CEO or direct to the Trust Board*

Q: Also, it is stated that the Scheme of Delegation will be based on the "strength of each school": how is the relative "strength" of each school in the MAT assessed and by whom and does this mean that each LGB could have different levels of responsibilities?

A: The steering committee have since decided that this would not be the case. AGBs of all schools would have the same delegated responsibilities.

This said school evaluations would determine the level of support given to any one school or AGB in order to ensure they were fulfilling their responsibilities. The evaluation which determines the level of support required would be conducted by the Trust Improvement Group and would be a holistic one. In other words we have no intention to judge schools by statistics alone.

Q: Are the Board of Directors salaried positions or volunteering positions? The proposed Board includes current school governors who I assume are not paid. What about the Members?

Q: Directors – concerned that this is a big ask. A huge role to take on voluntarily. How many hours will they work? Will they come into schools?

A: All of these positions are voluntary and there is no intention to create paid positions on the Trust Board or on the Academy Governing Bodies. The only paid director position is that of the CEO.

In our Articles of Association at the Trust level there is a detailed section ensuring any business interests between Trust Directors and the Trust are dealt with at 'arm's length' and that a Trust Director is excluded from any discussions that affect their interests. We are proposing to go further than this, including wording to restrict this even further in our Terms of Reference for the Trust Board.

The Directors are aware of the necessary commitment and would undergo appropriate training. They would be welcome to visit schools.

Q: I can see that it is your intention to govern in this way – but how to futureproof it for the long-term?

Q: Following the discussion about LGBs – what happens if the directors or members fail? How would they be replaced? Who elects them? Do members of LGB have a vote?

Q: If a member/director steps down who chooses their replacement?

A: Futureproofing, as far as we can, will come through the Articles of Association, Scheme of Delegation and the re-assurance that we have appointed high calibre directors and members, including representatives from each school and ensuring that almost all have local community involvement already.

Members would move to replace Directors if they are not performing to the required standard. In the event of Members not performing adequately the Regional Schools Commissioner will take action. New Directors would be recruited via the schools (if a school-linked director is standing down) or through Academy Ambassadors. They would be interviewed by other Directors and their appointment would be made officially by the Members.

Q: If the buck stops with the members – who are they? What are their working hours? Are they paid? Do they ever come into schools?

A: They are not paid, but are fully aware of the commitment they need to give. Their role is to provide independent oversight rather than to become too involved (unless there are problems) however they will be very welcome to visit and some have already expressed an interest in that.

Q: Who is the board accountable to?

A: As with any GB, the board remains accountable to it's stakeholders – children, parents, staff, as well as being accountable to Ofsted, the Regional Schools commissioner and the DfE.

Q: If the number of schools in the MAT grows to 6 does the number of directors and members need to increase as well? If they are volunteers it seems like a huge workload to oversee and be responsible for 6 schools.

A: The number will stay the same. The members and directors are already aware of their commitment. Sub-committees will consider different areas e.g. performance, finances, resources and the Heads and Academy GB's will provide appropriate reports.

Q: What is the CEO salary and on what basis will this be determined?

Q: How do we avoid creating 'fat cats', the high paid CEOs we see in the media?

A: The salary is currently being considered and there is no appetite for creating the huge salaries that have been portrayed in the media.

Q: Where will the CEO be based in a school or an office somewhere?

A: The CEO will be based within the schools, initially certainly at the Spinney School as that is where she will still be the head for part of the week.

Q: As CEO if you're taking on all this admin/ bureaucracy policies etc. How is that just one day a week?

Q: If Rae Snape becomes CEO this is a huge role to take on. How will she also be Head of the Spinney?

A: In considering how gradually the role of the CEO becomes full-time we have looked at other academy trusts and how their CEO roles evolved, as well as considering how the Spinney School can manage effectively.

Q: Key roles CEO, CFO – how do you plan to recruit?

Q: Could other people apply for the role of CEO?

Q: How long would the CEO stay in the post? What would be the process for recruiting a new CEO in the event of her leaving the post?

A: In considering the formation of the Innovation Trust we were aware that Rae Snape would be the designated CEO. Full checks and balances are being made to ensure that she has all the appropriate skills and competencies for this. At the point at which she moves on the post would be advertised. The CFO (Chief Financial Officer) role will be advertised. The financial work leading up to the formation of the MAT is being conducted by the our School Business Manager, with the support of the equivalent staff in the other 2 schools. To enable this to happen we have backfilled some of the work of our SBM to other very capable admin staff at our school. The costs of this will be taken from the money released by the DfE to enable this work and all the due diligence work to happen and not from school budgets.

Q: Will the CEO always be a teacher / head teacher?

A: We feel strongly that the CEO should always be a headteacher / teacher and we will need to ensure this is reflected in the articles.

Q: The Mayfield governing body has just elected our new Head teacher but for future reference who would be responsible for the Head teachers' appraisal and/or recruitment, the LGB or the MAT Board?

A: All of the Head teachers on the steering group agreed that the HT performance management should be conducted by the CEO. This has the benefit of putting performance management back under teachers, enabling greater access to educational expertise as well as preventing two lines of accountability. This also saves every school the cost of employing external advisors to support this process.

Recruitment processes, apart from Head and Deputy, will remain the sole responsibility of each school. For Heads and Deputies currently the school Governing Body works with a representative from the LA which has overall responsibility, under a MAT the academy Governing Body would work with a representative from the Trust Board which would have overall responsibility.

Q: At one extreme is the possibility of a centrally-controlled model, with little flexibility or delegation, that risks pressurising staff and weakening local identities. At the other extreme is the possibility of a highly devolved or eclectic arrangement that risks failing to learn from shared best practice. Where will the balance be struck, and what principles will guide decision-making?'

Q: Would it then leave those decisions in the hands to a board of Directors and tiered managerial structure that is not solely concerned with the pupil experience and their educational outcomes at this school? Is it not primarily motivated by competition and balancing the books rather than pupil experience?

A: The Articles of Association and Scheme of Delegation will guide decision making and we are looking at those currently. The primary reasons behind forming a MAT are to combine together to improve outcomes for all children, develop opportunities for staff development and strengthen leadership capacity. The Board and the Head teachers will be concerned to achieve the best outcomes for all children in all schools.

Q: Is it your intention to allow struggling schools to your MAT – if so why would this make good business sense? Theoretically you will be inheriting their potentially poor senior management, failing governing body and possibly poor teachers. Our good teachers would then be moved into the struggling school and diluting our excellence.

A: Any school wishing to join the MAT will be subject to the same due diligence as the founder schools including standards, financial position and ethos and vision. Struggling schools can vary greatly in the level and type of intervention required and that would be closely analysed during the due diligence period. There are many ways to provide school improvement support without moving our teachers e.g. observing lessons, modelling lessons, modelling planning and marking, introduction of new systems e.g. around phonics, training of support staff in interventions, mentoring senior staff etc. Some of our staff already support other schools and we are compensated for that financially. Where necessary support can also be bought in from outside the MAT. A struggling school would bring additional funding in order to support school improvement functions from within or from outside the MAT. The Board of Directors has the discretion to refuse to admit any school which it felt would adversely affect the MAT as a whole.

Parents

Q: If the GB believes that the educational welfare and experience of every pupil at our school can be better served along with a stable future for the school and community under this proposed plan would it be possible to outline how parents would be engaged to have an influence in their children's education?

A: This remains exactly as it is now as the GB has exactly the same remit in involving parents.

Q: Is it true that parental involvement in the MAT can be removed and the local governing bodies abolished?

Q: Will an academy structure take away from parents of our school pupils and school staff the autonomy to make critical decisions specific to this school?

A: That's not true. There will be a requirement in our Articles of Association and strict rules from the Department for Education that if we chose to remove the local governing bodies then we would need elected parents from our schools on the Trust board.

It is currently true of all Local Authority Schools that the local authority can take over the governance of a school, whether under the request of a local governing body stepping down, as has been the case in a local Cambridge school, or not by request. In the case of the local school there has been no parental involvement whilst the new body was, and still is, in place.

Critical decisions would be made after consultation with all stakeholders as is the case now.

Q: Where can parents go to if they have concerns?

Q: How do parents access the Members if things are going wrong?

A: Parents can still access the headteacher and the local Governing Body, as well as the Board of Directors or the Members. Instead of the Local Authority they can go to the Regional Schools Commissioner who already oversees all schools in the country, regardless of whether they are an Academy or LA school. They can still go to their councillor or their MP. Contact with Members or Directors would be made via the Clerk to the Board of Directors.

Q: There's been a misunderstanding – parents assume it's just going ahead. We need more clarification. There's been a lack of engagement and people think it's a foregone conclusion. The GB needs to explain more clearly what the proposals are.

A: It is possible that FS and Y1 parents and new parents will not have had the background to where we are now. About 2 years ago the GB started to look at future options, whether to stay as we are, go it alone as an academy, or join with an academy trust or to form our own academy trust. The GB wrote to all parents in September 2016 to alert parents to the GB actively investigating becoming a MAT. Following the work it undertook that term, the GB then informed the parents in January 2017, the outcome of their investigations and that we proposed to consider creating the Cambridgeshire Innovation Trust. In June 2017 The GB updated parents on progress and invited questions and comments to help inform their thinking, with the formal consultation letter coming out in December 2017. In between these letters there were updates within parents' newsletters and discussions with Parent Council.

Now is certainly the time to be asking questions and engaging. We are running all the due diligence alongside consultations and will report back on all of these, and the consultations and TUPE, to the GB, before any decisions are made.

Finance

Funding for our schools is a national-level issue that remains whether we are an academy or an LA school. All of us as head teachers are continuing to put pressure on the government to improve levels of funding. In Cambridgeshire we have been one of the lowest funded counties in the country for the last 30+ years.

Over the last 10 years particularly schools have taken on more and more business level functions. Through no fault of the local authorities more and more has been delegated to schools. Consequently we are already responsible for outsourcing – grounds maintenance, buildings maintenance, catering, human resources, IT systems, banking, curriculum support, specialist support and more. We already purchase our gas, electricity and resources through shared purchasing agreements outside of the LA. There is very little left to be able to achieve economies of scale by staying with the LA. Time and time again work that was undertaken at county level now falls on individual schools to undertake and so we are replicating the same things over and over again in individual schools, and with the sheer workload becoming more and more isolated in trying to manage it. Along with the pressures of other services such as social care and high level SEN also being cut, that workload is also ending up in schools with head teachers and senior staff struggling to maintain a focus on our core purpose.

We are in a position now that the Local Authority is unable to support us effectively. An amount of money is top sliced by the county before it reaches schools. Not all of that top slice is for services we access and I can think of 2 pockets of money taken currently, of £17000 and £6000 that we do not benefit from. If we were to join a MAT we would still need to pool some money and one of the due diligence exercises we are undertaking will be to see if the amount given to the top slice to the county covers what we would have to pay out if we were to become an academy.

There will not be additional on-going funding for becoming an academy. Each school is allocated a fund to support the due diligence procedures. The only small savings that we are likely to be able to make will be to merge some of the back office functions that each school undertakes currently but in the current funding climate the small savings will help.

Q: Are finances pooled? If yes, what state are the other 2 schools in? Would reserves/liabilities be shared? In either case would our school get to set its own budget and spend its funding as it sees fit or would these decisions be taken by the MAT Board?

A: As is the case under a LA the pooled funds are de-delegated from the schools budgets at source. We envisage this will be 3% in the first 6 months, then building up to 5%. This would enable us to centralise some business functions and contracts which currently fall into individual school budgets in consultation with the Head teachers and school business managers. The list of contracts that we will seek to align has not yet been agreed but it is the intention of the MAT that all Head teachers will have complete budget setting autonomy as is the current situation with the Local Authority. The MAT will only intervene if auditing indicates mismanagement of funds, as is the case with the local Authority.

A thorough due diligence process is currently being established to ensure that no undue risk is placed on any of the schools.

Q: It does not seem that there is a definite financial benefit in joining an MAT. Has due diligence been completed with regards to finance and costs?

Q: Financial savings are mentioned as a driver. Can you give examples of the financial savings for our school that will be made by joining a MAT please? Is it £10, £100, £1000, £10,000 pa, and for what services specifically?

A: It is true to say that at the point of transfer there will be no financial benefits, we have agreed to ensure that no school is worse off from the point of transfer. However, the process of aligning some contracts and beginning to create structures that will lessen the burden on school capacity will be the first task of the board and improvement team. This is because we believe that lessening the burden of business functions in the school will create more capacity for school leaders to improve teaching and learning.

Q: Is it true that there will be a shortfall in funding for all 3 schools and constant efforts will need to be made in fundraising thousands of pounds?

A: It is true nationally that there are anticipated to be major shortfalls in funding for all schools whether MAT or LA, but not because we are considering forming a 3 school MAT. We will need to complete due diligence to fully understand the financial plan, and if there is this kind of impact then we simply will not convert. Other small primary MATs in the county do have sound finances.

Q: Do the schools merge their finances and financial systems?

A: We would certainly need to align our financial systems as we do with the LA to ensure effective monitoring of the budget planning and spending but no, we will not be merging our finances.

Q: If there is a shortfall in finances who will fill the gap?

A: Just as we do now, each school will need to set its budget within the allocation of funding.

Q: In a time of economic uncertainties Brexit etc., are there any local businesses out there thinking of sponsoring us?

A: We would certainly be interested if any donations were to be made, subject to conditions, but we are absolutely not looking for sponsors.

Q: Do the three schools involved have financial liabilities?

A: In our initial application to even be able to get to this stage we had checks made on our budgets to ensure no school has a financial liability. Through due diligence being undertaken currently we will be delving even closer into each school's finances.

Q: I'm concerned about the funding required to grow – will it be cost effective? Will there be an increase in financial pressures? Do we really have to do this?

A: Finances will be looked at very carefully as each new school comes on board, as part of the due diligence at that stage.

Q: In light of how government strategy in outsourcing has recently failed many public services how can our school benefit from less democratic involvement, less community focus, less accountability and consultation to and with the people it serves?

Q: With the current governments continuing cuts to education isn't it now more important than ever before that our school funding is best managed by those who are directly involved with day to day management and those who have the best knowledge of the schools needs and requirements in a challenging future?

A: Absolutely and that will not change – each school will be managing its own budget.

Q: Is the MAT planning to sell of the land or playgrounds at our schools?

Q: What will happen to the school property? Will we own and have to maintain the land?

Q: Who owns the land/buildings?

Q: What stops the CEO from selling the sports field to a developer?

A: The MAT has no plans to sell any land or playgrounds. In fact being a MAT makes it more difficult to sell the land than as a Local Authority school. Note that (1) the MAT will not own the land, just have a long lease from the local authority, and (2) our grounds are also protected open spaces which means planning permission would not be granted.

Q: If a school had financial problems would other members of the MAT have to contribute their own money to support the finances of the school in trouble?

Q: Is there scope for this to be altered in the future?

A: No, each school has its own funding agreement and remains responsible for managing its budget on behalf of the children in that school. And no, this would be written in the Articles to ensure it cannot happen in the future.

Staff

Q: Won't the MAT take away the autonomy of the head teachers?

A: No, what will be useful is to be able to discuss what is happening in each school to a level that we do not have with the Local Authority, use that knowledge and then continue to run each of our schools effectively.

Q: What is the board's view of how accredited teaching standards will progress in the broadest sense with MAT's?

A: The National Standards for Teaching will remain equally applicable.

Q: Are current teachers supportive of converting to an Academy?

Q: What is the impact on staff?

Q: Called the Innovation Trust but innovation comes from teachers. They are innovative and forward looking. What difference will being in an academy make?

A: Initial feedback from staff has been positive. Many of us have specific contractual questions which will be addressed as part of the formal TUPE consultation process. EPM (our current HR advisors) will attend meetings with the staff- all relevant union bodies have also been invited.

Staff can see opportunities and benefits from working together and opportunities for some joint training. Some staff want to stay working only in their own schools, others can see opportunities in the future for moving between schools as being a step towards their professional development.

Q: I am concerned with teacher's terms and conditions. MATS vary hugely in working practice and some aspects of teacher's terms and conditions have changed. Some teachers have been redeployed to another school and then continuity of service, affecting entitlement to maternity, sick pay etc. Under the LA there are standards for all teachers. When a MAT is formed these can be renegotiated later so that new staff can be employed on separate terms and conditions.

Q: Is there a change to pensions for teachers and/or other staff?

A: All staff terms and conditions including pensions are protected by TUPE legislation. When staff transfer they can only have benefits or improvements and not any deterioration.

Q: What happens if a teacher or member of staff leaves our school and joins a Local Authority school? Is it true they can lose sick pay and maternity pay benefits?

A: Partly true. If staff leave the MAT to re-join a Local Authority school they may not have continuous service. It appears this varies with local authorities across the country. We are actively looking into the details of what this means precisely for all out staff in the context of Cambridgeshire and will be looking to our unions and our Personnel provider for clarity.

Q: Is it true that new staff can be employed on new terms and conditions?

A: Yes. We hope to create terms and conditions that make our Trust the most attractive place to work in the region. We will also ask that staff are willing to work in schools across the Trust.

Q: Will more unqualified teachers be used to teach the children?

A: All schools have always been able to appoint unqualified teachers as well as HLTAs (higher level teaching assistants). Many secondary schools may have unqualified teachers for specialist work. At one of the schools, in FS and Y1 they already have some HLTAs who cover teachers on their PPA (Planning, preparation and assessment time) as they are well known to the children, are skilled and know what we are teaching. We also have HLTAs and an unqualified teacher taking small groups for additional support. However, in principle we are a primary school and are clear that we want qualified teachers as the main class teachers.

Q: How in an Academy set up where teachers are forced into greater competition over jobs at pay rates set by private companies are we creating a sustainable system for all of society to benefit from? Is it not the responsibility of the state to ensure that all schools are appropriately funded to achieve the best outcome for every pupil through providing the best possible teaching standards and facilities?

A: All schools can already offer an individual school's pay range. This change happened a few years ago with all individual schools being able to have flexibility over pay, progression and pay rises. We are committed to working within the national pay spine for teachers as we wish to remain attractive employers. And yes to better national funding for all schools.

Q: At a local 4 school primary MAT it has become top heavy with extra finance staff. The Head teacher is the CEO, the head teacher no longer does any teaching, staff turnover has increased. Children are not at the centre any more, the MAT is only interested in expanding.

A: The Finance staff reflects what has happened in all schools, regardless of being in a MAT or being an LA school. Over the last 10 years more and more responsibilities have fallen on schools and proportionally more and more admin staff have been needed.

The headteacher not teaching is again a struggle in most schools. With joining a MAT we are certainly hoping to address this imbalance.

It's a great shame for all of us if children are no longer the centre in any school but knowing these schools and CEO this may be more to do with this particular MAT.

Rachel Evans – works at the NEU and is able to answer questions on legal issues and teachers' terms and conditions and pay. rachel.evans@neu.org.uk 07860 845059

Maintaining a relationship with the Local Authority

Q: To what an extent will the school keep up a relationship with the LA and other schools in the area outside of the MAT?

A: It's very important to us to maintain and grow our external relationships. All three founding schools play a role in school improvement with their neighbours. Our aim is to create a beacon for the region of what great primary education looks like. At our school we are part of a local cluster which includes secondary and primary schools whether academy or LA school. All LA meetings we attend already have a mixture of academies and LA schools. The Cambridgeshire School Improvement Board also reflects a mixture of LA and academy schools.

Q: If the MAT doesn't work out, how can the decision be reversed? Is it the case that once moved away from LA, there is no option to return?

A: That is the case so it is really important that this is set up carefully and that due diligence and consultation are performed properly.

Q: I work in the public sector and education and am about to go on strike because of the political conditions. The only compelling argument I've heard is that over the past ten years the LA has been 'demised'. So is it responsible to say fine let the LA go. This decision to form a MAT will further weaken the LA. This solution endorses what the government is doing to us.

A: The LA is already not able to work effectively and in the way it used to. And yes it does grate to endorse what is happening but it is not going to get any better.

Q: Isn't it better to liaise with 200 heads under an LA than a small group?

A: All the key contact groups within the LA already contain a mixture of LA schools and academies and liaison will continue exactly as it does currently.

SEND and specialist services provision

Q: Will the budget for these services be decided within the school or at a Board level? What about looked after children-virtual school services?

A: All SEN decisions that are currently made by the school will continue to be so. The LA continues to retain responsibility for high level SEN even within academies. The MAT will also look at providing centralised services to further support schools with SEN provision as this is currently a gap in central services.

Q: What will happen to Mayfield's Hearing Support Centre?

A: There is no anticipated change in regard to the HSC. Currently we have a SLA (Service Level Agreement) between the school and the HSC – our intention is to simply have the same agreement between the academy Mayfield School and the HSC.

Q: Some academies are doing what public schools do and get rid of pupils who are not achieving. Can you guarantee this would not happen?

A: Sadly this is happening in LA schools, including primary as well as some academies. We will continue with our commitment to do the best by all children.

Q: Academies have more powers to select a proportion of pupils – is there a safeguard to prevent the choice of more academic pupils/rejection of less?

A: This is not a “selective” MAT so we are not in a position, even if we wanted to and we don’t, to select pupils. We remain part of the County Admissions process. Academies are required to comply with the Admissions and Admissions Appeals Codes of Practice. Academies are also required to participate in LA coordination of Admissions processes and the LA’s Fair Access Protocol. Parents of children with statements or EHCPs (Education and Health Care plans) can request the named school to be an academy just as they can for an LA school and normal procedures would apply.

Curriculum

Q: Will the curriculum be changed in the MAT?

Q: Will we follow the national curriculum?

Q: If MAT happens in the next school year, do you already have a clear plan for the new curriculum?

Q: Will we still do SATS tests?

A: All LA schools have a requirement to follow the national curriculum as part of their overall curriculum. Academies are not required to do this. At each of our schools we reviewed our curriculum when the current new curriculum was originally introduced and will continue to do so, regardless of whether we become an academy. We are all committed to a broad curriculum for all children which encompasses the sciences and arts with a clear focus on the standards required for all schools in English, Maths and Science. Any curriculum changes we make for next year will be changes that our school has chosen to make, regardless of whether we form a MAT. Sadly, SATS testing applies to academies too.

Q: How would running the school within a trust and as a business that is less transparent, with less legal obligation to uphold national standards and more divergence from standards set for local authority schools be better for pupils and the community in which it plays a significant role?

Q: These changes to the curriculum, emphasis on maths and measuring everything – have MATs been responsible for this?

Q: Since a local MAT formed there is a definite predominance of English and Maths.

A: The National Standards remain in place for all schools, whether we agree or not with testing at the ages of 4, 5, 7 and 11 years. MATS have not been responsible for this. This is national expectations on all schools. I know of many LA schools struggling to maintain a balanced curriculum. All schools are under huge pressure to pass the tests and come under scrutiny for children to perform. We continue, and will continue, to set a broad curriculum to meet the needs of all our children academically, socially and culturally. .

Q: What changes or impact will the children see?

Q: We’re already going to Fitzwilliam etc... what would change?

A: The children will see very little directly, ultimately through continued improved teaching and leadership. We will continue to provide access to the excellent opportunities available in and around Cambridge.

Q: Is the MAT going to consider giving parents a choice of which foreign language they would like their children to learn? Choice of 2 languages: French or Spanish (not just French)

A: The choice remains with each individual school, and at Spinney we currently have an excellent French specialist who is returning from maternity leave.. However, should the situation change I can see that we might want to consider options with the other two schools and there may then be opportunities to share a specialist teacher.

Policies/ethos

Q: Would being in an MAT bring on a homogenisation of policies? For example it may be that one of the other schools in the MAT operates a very strict behaviour policy that works well for that school and its pupils but that would not work well for an other school or would be against its ethos and character. Would our school be able to choose which "best practices" it would like to implement and how would that right be guaranteed?

Q: Parents choose schools because of its policies? Can we reject undesirable MAT policies?

A: We are certainly hoping that we can have some centralisation of policy writing as this is extremely time consuming and duplicated within each school and see this as a major benefit – we must have over 50 policies in each school relating to Personnel, Health & Safety, Premises, Risk assessments, data protection each needing to be reviewed by each school and each looking remarkably similar.

Any curriculum/ teaching and learning policies will be considered by the trust improvement team over time. The trust improvement team consists of the head teachers of the three schools alongside the CEO. However, it is unlikely that we will achieve any one size fits all policies. We believe that part of what makes a well-run school great is its unique identity in terms of educational policies which are tailored to the needs of their communities. Schools may well choose to align or adopt good practice seen in other schools but this would be achieved by mutual interests in developing particular areas. In the example of behaviour policies it is likely that the trust will establish driving principles for managing behaviour such as creating a culture of mutual respect rather than fear. This would then be translated into a policy or process by the schools individually and may therefore look completely different.

Q: Many of the benefits outlined in the Innovation Trust documents are perceived benefits. Moreover, some of the suggested benefits (share expertise, shared training, etc.) are not exclusive to academies of MATs, especially if our school is already working closely with these two schools. Why would the Governing body consider the option of our school losing (a small or big) part of its autonomy by joining an MAT rather than explore other forms of connecting with like-minded schools?

Q: Given the current close collaboration with CB4 schools, and the sharing of best practice for teaching & learning across these schools, what are the advantages of joining with the two proposed schools as a MAT?

Q: Sharing good practice between schools is wonderful. Is there anything substantive preventing you as three schools from doing that anyway without being in a MAT? Some schools choose to federate.

Q: You talk about schools retaining their independence but then you talk about sharing resources an heads being in other schools, staff moving/sharing -> this does not seem independent.

A: The Head teachers of the schools have not expressed concern over losing autonomy. We have all agreed that particularly over the last few years due to cuts in the LA Head teachers have been spending increasing amounts of time working on school business functions. We believe that the level of autonomy has added pressure on leadership teams and taken them away from their true area of expertise. Loss of autonomy in these areas is therefore a benefit.

With regards to teaching and learning the MAT does not intend to remove any of these responsibilities from the Head teachers and they will continue to have autonomy where it matters, with the mandate that they consult with their AGBs.

We have worked collaboratively with other schools for many years, often on projects and events. More recently we have started to share work more related to standards but this has been with schools dipping in and out, leading to some frustrations in being able to work together effectively. The opportunity to work together more formally with other good schools gives us more of an imperative. Similarly with training, schools are dipping in and out so it is hard to form firm foundations to build improvement work on. Even as a good school, we should be challenged to do even better, for all our children.

Q: Given the enormity of this step and the fact that once done it cannot be undone it feels that our school is jumping before it is pushed. As a good and strong school could we not also join an MAT later (maybe this very one given our shared values and ethos!) if the situation demands it?

A: None of the schools starting this trust are being pushed into doing so. All of the schools could choose to join a MAT at any time. These MATs will however be formed entities. We see this as an opportunity to create something together that achieves services specifically tailored to the needs of primary schools. Starting as a founder school ensures we are fully represented at the Trust Improvement level.

The heads of each of the 3 schools will form the trust improvement team along with the CEO, and as such intend to work closely together to continually improve teaching and learning in each school. The local authority is so stretched in it's capacity to support schools that each school has had limited / no support for school improvement as our test results are deemed to be good or good enough. We know, however, there are areas within which we would benefit from seeing how the other schools operate and within a formalised MAT would guarantee this would happen.

Adding in new Schools

Q: If the MAT is set to expand what is the rationale for being in at the beginning? Why not see how it goes and join at a later date?

A: Starting as a founder school ensures we are fully represented at the Trust Improvement level.

Q: Expanding from 3 to 5-6 schools in two years seems like a rapid expansion without testing the model. Is it risky to expand so dramatically?

A: The three schools will lay the foundations – once secure the MAT will then open up to other schools, the MAT wants to grow strongly not recklessly. Our primary purpose is to provide a first rate education, it's not about making money. As primary specialists the MAT will build in as many safeguards as possible. If expansion seems to be too rapid we will slow down.

Q: What will the impact be of new schools joining the Trust that need support? Will that have an impact on teaching at the founding schools?

Q: School near Spinney is failing and has received no money for improvement. They have no chair of governors and are waiting for a MAT to save them. Can't see how my child's education here will benefit by stripping of assets by a MAT.

Q: If take on a failing schools would our teachers have to go there? That's not a good incentive to keep or attract staff to our school

Q: If I work at this school will I have to move schools?

Q: You talk about schools retaining their independence but then you talk about sharing resources an heads being in other schools, staff moving/sharing -> this does not seem independent.

Q: Is it your intention to allow struggling schools to your MAT – if so why would this make good business sense? Theoretically you will be inheriting their potentially poor senior management, failing governing body and possibly poor teachers. Our good teachers would then be moved into the struggling school and diluting our excellence.

A: All of our schools are already individually supporting other schools and already put in the checks and balances to ensure this is not detrimental to our children. The MAT will put the necessary structures in place to ensure this collaboration is well planned and not a drain on any one schools capacity. Meanwhile staff who support in other schools enjoy this extra layer to their roles and that feeds back into support and enthusiasm in our school as well as ensuring we retain some of our great teachers through this professional development opportunity. We are not about to send all our teachers elsewhere to the detriment of our children.

A school may have deemed to be failing but that does not mean it doesn't have some excellent teachers.

We will not be requiring any teacher to move schools if they don't want to.

How MATs work & Regional Trends

Q: If one school in the MAT is failing, is it true that all schools can be re-brokered?

A: In theory that's possible. Imagine the situation with a two school MAT, if one school has to leave then the remaining schools is unlikely to be sustainable on its own and so would need to be re-brokered. For poorly performing schools, whether academies or LA schools, they have to join another MAT and there are very few MATs in a position to be sponsors. For LA schools we can already be directed to join a MAT if we are deemed to be a coasting school

Q: In Cambridgeshire currently

- 1. How many primary schools are academies? And how many of those are in a MAT?**

A: 65

A: 54

- 2. How many primary schools are in the process of becoming an academy?**

A: There are 21 conversions currently being processed by the county.

In addition a further number of primary schools are actively researching MAT options, including several local schools.

Other questions

Q: Are there any examples of an Academy which has been successful? So far I have just seen negative press about them.

Academies in the press in financial trouble

LA bailed out an academy recently – at a cost £2million

Academies in Peterborough area are acting unreasonably – demolishing good school buildings, level of education has dropped.

A: Our consultant, who has worked with us for several years and also works with other schools shared her positive experience in working with a small primary MAT. Equally, our local secondary providers, where most of our children will go at Y7, are certainly working very successfully.

Q: Having heard about the school adviser's experience of a small MAT – what are the negatives? It can't all be positive?

A: Nothing can be all positive, there would be teething issues but it is our task to see what we can do for the best.

Decision Making

I don't get it at the moment. Am just beginning to find out and it's nearly the end of the consultation process. Another meeting would be beneficial.

Who will make the decision about forming the MAT? What is the process? What due diligence has taken place? I understand other schools have pulled out – what has been learned from them?

What is the timeframe for this decision?

It's taken a long time to get to where you are now – what's next? What is the outcome if parents object?

Is there a right to reply for parents?

Parents have no vote and there hasn't been enough time for proper consultation.

Timeframe – will there be another consultation with parents? Parents feel that they don't have enough information at the moment to have a view.

Can the view of the parents change anything? Will the MAT go ahead regardless?

When the GB vote for/against each school joining, will it be a straight majority, or 2/3 or what?

A long TUPE consultation needs to take place with staff and in addition we have to complete extensive legal and financial due diligence before any decision can be made. We will continue to be open to discussion with parents and are considering further meetings.

The governing body has to consider the needs of current pupils and staff and also the needs of future pupils and staff. We also have to consider the consequences of not joining a MAT. Nobody knows for sure what the educational climate will look like in the future so we are looking at the changes which have been occurring over the last 10 years. The responsibility for taking this decision lies with the governing body and a majority vote will decide. We all want to ensure the very best outcomes for children and families of The Spinney and feel the weight of this responsibility.