

Heswall Primary School Academy Conversion Consultation Questions & Answers

Parents and Carers Meeting, Tuesday 24th January 2023 at 5.15pm

Attendees:

Jonathon Lawrenson, Headteacher, Heswall Primary
Linda Spall – Chair of Governors, Heswall Primary
John Spofforth – Parent governor, Heswall Primary
Tony Lacey, CEO, Oak Trees Multi Academy Trust
Hardip Hayer, Senior Project Manager, AMF (UK) Ltd
Emily Comyn, Senior Project Support Officer, AMF (UK) Ltd
Parents/ Carers X16

Question: Will there be additional revenue streams for the school and if so, what would these be?

Answer: Not really, but less would be taken by the trust from school funding than is currently taken by the local authority. Trusts can also apply for funding for things like building work (for schools).

Question: How will the trust decide which schools get the funding for things like building work?

Answer: The trust will prioritise need, there will be no element of 'favouritism' involved. School Condition Surveys which are undertaken as part of the due diligence process during the conversion process help to identify which schools require funds for immediate works.

Question: Will there be a cooling off period when the school can change to a different trust?

Answer: No. The consultation and relationship-building exercise has gone on for a long time and will continue until the end of August, when it is proposed that the relationship will become formal. This means that both parties have had time to make sure that the relationship feels right. The school can withdraw at any point up to the end of August. Schools can also be moved from one trust to another if the existing trust is deemed to be failing the school. The school can't move back to the local authority once it has become an academy.

Question: Are all parties satisfied that it will definitely be the case that the school will be in a better financial position than it is at the moment?

Answer: Yes. Money is currently provided by the local authority for services that the school can't access and the training offered by the trust is much more extensive than what is offered by the local authority, so there won't be a need to pay for external training. It's currently not possible to give the teachers the support the headteacher would like – joining a MAT would improve this situation. All schools that have joined Oak Trees MAT are now in a better position financially than they were at the point of joining.

Question: Will any unqualified teachers be teaching the children?

Answer: No – all teaching staff are fully qualified and will continue to be so.

Question: Will any new staff be employed under the same terms and conditions as current staff?

Answer: Yes.

Question: As a parent this proposal sounds great. How do staff feel about the school becoming an academy?

Answer: Initially there were concerns about things like pensions and the likelihood of being moved to a different school within the trust, but these concerns have been addressed and staff have been reassured. Some staff have already accessed training provided by the trust, so are familiar with it and how it works. The headteacher, business manager and chair of governors have all been to some of the other primaries within the trust and spoken to staff there and are reassured by what they have heard.

Question: Will there be some sort of contract setting out the promises made?

Answer: Oak Trees MAT website has the Articles of Association on it, which set out the formal arrangements for schools within the trust. The scheme of delegation, which sets out who is responsible for what, is also available on the Trust's website. The headteacher is responsible for making decisions about the curriculum and the school will be following the National Curriculum (as all trust schools do). If the trust doesn't deliver the CPD promised, the head will be taking this up with them. The trust is built on equality - there is no 'flagship' school or favourite school – all are equal.

Question: What are the disadvantages of joining the trust?

Answer: Responsibility for health and safety will pass to the trust, which will mean having to stop using the people currently used by the school – this is something the headteacher finds hard as he has a lot of loyalty to them. Schools joining the trust need to throw themselves wholeheartedly into it in order to get the most out of it e.g. attend the training that's on offer.

Question: Will staff be moved between schools?

Answer: This has never been done before and there are no plans to start doing it now. The trust has an input in deciding who to appoint as headteacher and deputy headteacher, but no other staff.

Question: Egremont School joined the trust and a short time later, a large number of staff were made redundant, will that be the case with Heswall?

Answer: No. Staff at Egremont were not made redundant, they were redeployed within the trust as the school was in a very difficult financial position.

Question: Will the PTA stay as it is?

Answer: Yes – it will still be Heswall PTA. The PTA can collaborate with other PTAs within the trust if it wishes to, but there is no requirement to share funds. All funds raised stay with the school.

Question: So the school isn't responsible for helping out other schools that may be in crisis?

Answer: No. The funding stays the same for all schools and funds stay with the school.

Question: Will the Beehive childcare provision continue?

Answer: Yes – everything within the school will stay the same, as will the preschool.

Question: Will ancillary services remain the same?

Answer: For the moment, yes. The governors will continue to run the school.

Question: How has the trust turned the financial position of poorly-performing schools around?

Answer: The trust has set up new contracts with things like IT support and kitchen suppliers. The trust has economies of scale. The trust can apply for funding for things like building work, which means schools are paying out less in buildings maintenance. It takes time to improve finances and the trust has never done this through staffing cuts. The Trust looks at the infrastructure and services to help reduce costs.

Question: Will the buildings and land become assets of the trust?

Answer: No. The local authority will continue to own them and the trust will most likely be provided with 125 year lease for the school building and land.

Question: Will Ofsted inspect each school as its own entity?

Answer: Yes.

Question: The trust board is responsible for all schools – are there any parents on the board?

Answer: No, as the board needs objectivity and to be completely impartial; however, all schools have local governing bodies which include parent governors and the governors have input into all decisions affecting the school. All heads meet with the trust two in every three weeks and feed into decisions being made. The CEO isn't a trustee – all trustees are independent.

Parent/ Carer Feedback Received Through Feedback Form or Email:

Comment: But need time to read all info and ask Q.

Staff Meeting, Tuesday 24th January 2023 at 3.45pm

Attendees:

Jonathon Lawrenson, Headteacher, Heswall Primary
Linda Spall – Chair of Governors, Heswall Primary
Tony Lacey, CEO, Oak Trees Multi Academy Trust
Hardip Hayer, Senior Project Manager, AMF (UK) Ltd
Emily Comyn, Senior Project Support Officer, AMF (UK) Ltd
Staff members X17

Question: Does the MAT have a fixed number of schools that it will take on?

Answer: It's not set in stone – the DfE wants Oak Trees MAT to grow larger than it currently is. Around 5,000 pupils or 10-15 schools is ideal. More schools can join at any point. The trust doesn't want to get too big.

Question: Will staff no longer be employed by the LA?

Answer: On conversion, the staff will be employed by Oak Trees Multi Academy Trust and will no longer be employed by Wirral LA. Pensions will remain the same as they are now. Teachers will be offered the Teachers Pension Scheme and Support staff will be offered the Local Government Pension Scheme.

Question: Some TAs have Wirral Borough Council pensions – would these continue?

Answer: Yes.

Question: Will holidays and term dates stay in line with the rest of Wirral?

Answer: Yes. 1/2 inset days will ideally be the same for the whole MAT, with the remaining 3/4 days being set by the school.

Question: Will staff be moved within the trust?

Answer: No. Staff contracts will be with the trust, but staff will stay within their existing schools; however, opportunities within the trust can be facilitated if people would like to move.

Question: Will there be any change to the inspection process?

Answer: No. Schools can't be inspected within 18 months of becoming an academy. Adrian who is the School Improvement Lead at the Trust is an Ofsted inspector and can support schools preparing for Ofsted.

Question: How does SEN provision work within the trust?

Answer: The trust has a SEN Lead, who works with SENCOs within the trust. The aim of the support the trust provides is to make SEN paperwork easier and to help with consistent testing. The trust has a range of support on offer, including an ed psych, SALT (at a discounted rate), ADHD support (at a discounted rate) and a therapist. Schools can still buy into external services, for example Behaviour Support, if they wish to.

Question: Can schools still use the apprentice levy to train TAs?

Answer: Yes – schools are still entitled to this funding.

Question: What effect will becoming an academy have on support staff?

Answer: The kitchen provision will continue as it currently is. There is an impact on the workload of office staff, but the trust provides lots of support and any system changes are done behind the scenes so that office staff are ready to go on day one. Staff can speak to other staff within the Trust schools.

Question: Will staff contracts be affected?

Answer: No, only the employer will change from the local authority to the trust. T&Cs will remain the same and continuous service will carry over. The trust offers all staff a 'thank you' day that they can take off at any point.

Question: Will existing links with universities and their teacher training programmes continue?

Answer: Yes.

Question: What's in it for the trust?

Answer: The DfE wants the trust to expand. The trust wants to see better outcomes for children in Wirral. The trust wants school staff to be happy so that they remain within the trust's schools – they recognise that large numbers of people are wanting to leave schools. The trust benefits from the different expertise in different schools.